

SECOND EDITION.

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Dorchester, Mass.*



Entered at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., at Second Class Mail Rates.

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December 18, 1888.

No. 595.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

Vol. XXIII.

DEADWOOD DICK JR.

IN

BEELZEBUB'S BASIN



OR,

THE OLD MAN OF MOUNT MAB.

A Romance of the Wind River Range.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BESS.

A MERRY peal of musical laughter, yet strangely enough it sounded, considering how wild and desolate were the surroundings; a point in the heart of the Wind River Range of Wyoming, where one might rather have expected the scream of a wild beast, or the war-whoop of the red-man.

It was near nightfall of a pleasant early summer's day, and a lone horseman who was wending his way through a deep canyon of the grand

THE SIGHT WAS DECIDEDLY STARTLING AND GHOSTLY, AND DICK, ALTHOUGH NOT CREDULOUS AS TO THINGS SUPERNATURAL, COULD NOT HELP FEELING AWED.

old range, abruptly drew rein as the laughter greeted his hearing.

He was a handsome, lithely built man of between twenty-two and twenty-six years of age, with a fresh, clear-cut countenance, and dark-brown hair and eyes, the latter in particular being keen and penetrating.

Mounted upon a spirited roan horse, the way he sat him proved that much of his life had been spent in the saddle.

His dress was a plain business suit of gray, with accompaniment of top-boots and jaunty sombrero, and he was armed with a rifle and revolvers.

The point at which he drew rein was one of the deepest and gloomiest in the canyon, the mountains rising to tremendous height on either side, while ahead and behind the almost straight course of the canyon was rapidly filling up with lurking shadows.

"Hello! that was an unusual sound in this out-of-the-way place!" he exclaimed. "A woman's laugh, as I live, and, if I mistake not, the laugh of a young woman, too. But, where is she? I see nothing of her, or of any human habitation."

His keen gaze scanned the surroundings, but it was evident the lady of the laugh was concealed somewhere close at hand, for she certainly was not within range of the horseman's vision.

"I guess she must be a little further on!" he soliloquized, and started up his horse.

Only a few steps, however, when there came a repetition of the musical laugh, this time nearer at hand than before.

The horseman drew rein again, puzzled, and at the same time curious.

"Hello! there!" he shouted. "Who's that laughing?"

For answer a female stepped from the shadow of a boulder, so close to him, that he involuntarily gave a start.

"It was me!" was the answer, before he had time to make out what kind of a looking personage "me" was. "I laughed first, because you seemed so innocent of my close proximity, and second because you were apparently startled at the sound of a voice in this wild place."

"In truth, I was," the horseman replied. "Who are you, and what in the world are you doing here, so far from civilization?"

"Who am I? Oh! I'm Bess Bly. I belong to the stranded tourist crowd. Who are you? Some lone road-agent, I suppose!"

"Well, hardly! Even if I was, you don't seem to be much disconcerted by my presence?"

"Why should I be? Robbers are not all as bad as they're pictured, I've heard say. In fact, I've always had a longing to see how a real *bona fide* road-agent looked, like Deadwood Dick, for instance."

The horseman laughed oddly.

"You may have an opportunity of seeing that individual if you remain in these regions," he said.

"Indeed? I should so like to see him. Is he really so awfully bad?"

"Yes, I allow he's a bad customer at times. Shouldn't you think so of a galoot who hunts up a man to kill before breakfast, just for an appetizer?"

"Oh, mercy! What a horrible wretch he must be, to be sure. But, you haven't told me your name?"

"My name is Bristol. By the way, you haven't told me of your party. What did you mean by stranded?"

"Just what the word implies. I belong to a party of summer tourists, who were doing the mountains for pleasure. Yesterday our guide, Cojeta Jim, mysteriously left us, after having a few words with De Percy Todd, and as none of our party knew anything about these parts, we are left in the lurch, and don't know which way to turn to get out of the wilderness."

"Ah, I see. Rather a bad fix for a party of strangers to be left in, and surely a queer idea for a party to attempt to do the Rockies, with no other protection or escort than one guide."

"Just what I think; but then, it was Major De Campion's notion, and what he says, goes."

"Where are your party now?"

"Down the gulch about a mile further, where we were camped, when Cojeta Jim left us."

"And how comes it you are wandering so far from camp? Were you not afraid?"

"No. Everybody in camp was grumbling and peevish, and so I came up here to see if I couldn't find some hop-toads. I think they're such nice, cunning little pets, don't you?"

Bristol laughed heartily.

"Well, they're about the last thing I should think of as pets," he said.

"You should see the collection I have at home—four of 'em, and they all sing. One sings alto, another tenor, another baritone, and the other base. They're a great curiosity too."

"I should say they would be. By the way, miss, of whom is your party composed?"

"Oh, they're a queer lot, and you'll say so when you see 'em. I call 'em the Crank Cohort. Crank number one is Major Roscoe De Campion from Australia. He's rich, gouty, grouty, and is going to marry aunty. He is a Spiritualist, and the spirits told him of a great buried treasure in these mountains, if—if he looked long enough for it, I guess. That's what started our expedition."

"I see. Well, that sounds well for a beginning. Who is next?"

"Crank two is aunty. She was my mother's sister, and used to be plain Sarah Jane Smithers. Since she broke loose on Washington society, she's Mrs. W. Walsingham De Blandford!"

Dick laughed again.

"I see you are not blind to the foibles of friends," he observed.

"Not at all. I'm a plain, matter-of-fact girl, and don't believe in snobbery and deceit. Crank 3 is Raphael De Percy Todd. His real name is Toddles, but he chopped off the *les* after he reached the age of wisdom-tooth. He is one of those awfully awful fellows, don'tcher know; courts the Muses, that is to say, writes poetry, and reads it off by the yard to my cousin."

"Gerald De Campion, Crank 4, is dark, has little to say to any one except to me, and is just mysterious enough to be charming. He is the eldest son of the major. Noel, his brother, is light, gay, and handsome—so is not a crank."

"My cousin is the fifth crank. Her real name is Nancy, but she has re-christened herself Editha. She is languid, insipid, and afraid of snakes."

"Crank the sixth is Barnabas Bugstein, a Jew. He joined our party recently. He saved aunty from being masticated by a cinnamon bear, and since then she insists on his going along with the show. He claims to be a perambulating insurance operator."

"The seventh crank is myself, Betsy Bly, at your service, and I finish the number—that is, I cap the climax, being the crankiest crank of the whole lot."

"Not if I'm any judge of character," Dick replied.

In the mean time, he had been watching his new and singularly made acquaintance, with great interest, for she was quite pretty, possessing a *petite*, graceful figure, and a roguish, sunny face, lit up with particularly bright and fascinating eyes.

Her pleasant, off-handed, and unsophisticated manners were even as charming as herself, and something out of the order with most women the great Wild West detective had encountered.

She was about eighteen years of age, in the prime of health, and a picture of budding womanhood that would have aroused the enthusiasm of even a greater critic than Deadwood Dick.

Attired in a pretty pink-and-gray cloth dress, and jaunty hat, her flossy brown hair rippled over her shoulders, nearly to the waist.

"I am glad to have met you, Miss Bly," the horseman averred, "but sorry to hear that your party has been left in the lurch. I am pretty well versed in mountain life, and if you will take me to your camp, no doubt I can arrange with Major De Campion to get him out of his dilemma."

"Oh, I know he will be glad to see you, and will pay you almost any price to guide us out of the mountains," Betty declared. "Come along, sir, and I will show you the way. But, if you find the crowd a queer lot, you must overlook it. Their ways may seem very odd to you."

"I guess there will be no difficulty on that score," Dick replied. "I'm used to all sorts of people."

Then his pretty friend led off, and he followed on his favorite horse, Electric, wondering what new experience he was about to encounter.

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANDED TOURISTS.

PRETTY Miss Betty hurried along through the canyon, with quick, elastic step, never looking back at the detective. The canyon grew slightly narrower, as they advanced, and then turned sharply to the right, whence it ran on for another half mile, when it suddenly opened into a round, mountain-locked valley or basin, covering several thousand acres, the greater portion of which space was absorbed in a beautiful crystal lake—one of the head reservoirs of Green River, in fact.

Just as Dick and Bet debouched into the basin, the luminous round May moon appeared between two lofty snow-crowned peaks, and shed its mellow light upon the picturesque landscape, causing the ripples of the crystal water to resemble myriads of dancing silver bars and stars. All around them rose the towering peaks of dull gray rock, to a stupendous height, and for the most part but sparsely timbered with scrub pines.

The lowest peak of them all, was fully one thousand feet above the lake surface, and had a singular appearance, as if, at some past period, it had been sawed off, near its pinnacle.

The fringe of land surrounding the lake was level and fertile, and afforded excellent grazing; and, all considered, the panorama was one of peculiar beauty, and in that high and remote wilderness a great surprise.

Deadwood Dick uttered an expression of delight.

"Jupiter! this is a regular picnic of a place, isn't it?" he said, enthusiastically.

"I like it!" Bet replied. "It is just wild and secluded enough to be romantic. I only wish I had my drawing materials with me that I might sketch the scenery."

"You are an artist, then?"

"Only an apology for one. I took to drawing quite naturally, when I was at school, but never had the opportunity of finishing my studies in that line, for aunty took me from school, and set me to doing housework. It was real mean of aunty, too, for I liked school. But, yonder is the camp."

Upon the shore of the lake was a little encampment, consisting of a few tents, and a couple of mountain coaches, known in technical Western terms as "hearses."

Several horses were picketed out to graze in the vicinity; a couple of camp-fires were burning, and gathered about them the tourist party were to be seen.

Bet and Dick advanced, and were soon in the heart of the encampment, where Bristol dismounted, and was introduced to each individual member of the party.

And by the time this ceremony was finished, he had concluded that there was more truth than fiction in Betty's decision that they were a party of cranks.

Major Roscoe De Campion, was a short, fat and florid individual, on the shady side of fifty, with a round head and visage, small peering eyes, iron-gray side-whiskers and hair, and a wart on the nose; likewise he was bow-legged, and limped when he walked. He was dressed in a serviceable, traveling costume, but wore an extra large diamond stud in his shirt front.

"Glad to meet you, young man!" he declared. "If it hadn't been for one of your cussed countrymen, we would not be in this nawsty trouble. Blarst his cussed picture, if it wasn't for my cussed gout, I'd 'a' mounted a horse, and gone in search of him, you know."

De Campion was evidently of English extraction, and the proficiency with which he could "cuss" things at once established his individuality.

Mrs. W. Walsingham De Blandford was not English, although she somewhat affected the craze. She was a large woman, with a fat face, and an overbearing air. But, affectation in such a mountain of flesh, no cosmetics or finery could make otherwise than ridiculous.

"Oh! yes, it was quite proper you should come to our rescue, young man," she said, loftily, "and of course if you can prove to our satisfaction that you are trustworthy, we shall have you conduct us to a place of safety, and pay you a fair price for your services. We shall have to be assured, of course, that you are not such a wretch as that man Cojeta Jim, before we trust ourselves to your escort."

Which Deadwood Dick decided was pretty "cheeky," inasmuch as he had not yet offered his services as guide.

The next to be introduced was Mr. Raphael De Percy Toddles, otherwise Todd—a tall, lean, spindle-shanked individual, with a pinched, cadaverous countenance, eyes of the palest blue, tow-colored hair and a thin, reddish mustache. So tall and stiff he appeared, that, were he to bend over, forward, it seemed as if he must snap in two.

"Aw! really, I am awfully delighted, my deah boy!" he declared, seizing Dick's hand. "It gives me gweat pleasure to know you wild, womantic, uncultured Westerners, it does, I assuah you! There is something so novel, an' so chawming, about your rude life which I, as a poet, can rhythm into stanzas, don'tcher know. I suppose you encounter lots of weally exciting adventuuh, too, deah boy?"

"Dead loads of it!" Dick said, giving Raphael De Percy's slender hand a squeeze that made him jump. "It's a cold rainy day, old socks, when I can't kill a couple of men before breakfast!"

"Old socks!" Goodness gwacious, what a horrid expression. I never wore a pair of old hose in my life, sir—never!"

And the dude crank backed off, in disgust. The brothers De Campion "panned out" better.

Gerald, handsome, dark and imposing, and Noel, blonde, bright and brilliant, shook hands with Dick cordially, and bade him welcome to the camp.

Last to be introduced was Benjamin Bugstein, a sleek, natty, ferret-eyed individual, with the map of the "chosen race" indelibly stamped all over his visage.

"Mine frient, I never vas so dickled vot I vas to make your acquaintance, so helb me!" Bugstein assured. "I halev a brudder Isaac, once, how as vas dot ferry tin-type of you, and that's a combliment, too, for Isaac he vas a smart young fellow, if I do dell you. But, Isaac vas onexperienced, shust like dot little baby vone week old, and he tink he sdart out in de vorlat mit himself. Poor poy! he goes into dot vilderness to pecome a soltyer, an' he halev no insurance on his life, and he got deat vid a pullet in his headt, between der eyes. Dot shows dot efferybody should put von of dose policies on deir lives purty quick for brotection. Now, mine frient, I represent der very best company in dot insurance—"

"Oh! give us a rest!" Dick replied. "I don't want your policies. I have no one to reap the benefits of insurance on my death, so you can count me out!"

"But, mine frient, maybe you sometime vill get married, and den—"

"No marrying on my plate, Solomon. So let me give you a pointer: If you've got any policies to get rid of, you'd better plaster 'em all over yourself, and go take a sleep. When you awake in the next world maybe you will have realized a fortune on them!"

Bugstein evidently did not like this sort of rebuff and suggestion, and subsided at once.

The introductions over, De Campion, senior, proceeded to monopolize Deadwood Dick's attention.

"Now, young man," he said, "I want to know just what you think of the cussedness of our situation!"

"Nothing particularly terrible about it, and you might have gone further and done worse!" Dick replied, in his calm, reassuring way.

"But, look here, young man, we must get out of this blarsted fix, without delay. If you are a competent guide, I am ready to close a bargain with you, and we will start at once!"

"I am not a guide, as that word is understood here in the West, but being familiar with mountain-life, I would have no difficulty in leading you to some point from where you could guide yourself—providing I were to undertake such a thing—which, for the present, is impossible!"

"How, impossible?"

"I must have rest, before all else except food. I have been in the saddle for over thirty-six hours, and am all tuckered out."

"You can rest, afterward. I have my reasons for leaving this blarsted place at once, and you must act as our guide. I shall not be stingy about what price you ask!"

"It would make no difference if you were to offer me a fortune!" Dick replied, spiritedly, "for there is not money enough in the mint to hire me to do what I don't want to do!"

"Then you don't want to conduct us hence?"

"I have not said so. But, I do say that I don't propose to move a step out o' this basin until I am rested, and get good and ready!"

De Campion scowled. He evidently was not in the habit of being addressed in this decisive manner.

"You're mighty independent!" he growled.

"That's because I'm built that way!" Dick replied, good-naturedly. "I generally do pretty much as I please, you know, when the wind blows right!"

"Well, sir, I'll blarsted quick assure you you can't do it in this camp!" De Campion retorted. "So if you refuse to guide us away from here, you are not welcome to the hospitality of my camp."

"No? All right, then. There's plenty of room for both of us in this pocket, so I will take my leave!" and seizing Electric by the bridle-rein, he sauntered coolly away, leaving the tourists' camp behind.

Selecting a cosey spot on the lake-shore, a few

hundred yards distant, he tethered Electric out to graze, gathered some fuel and started a fire, and from his saddle-trappings brought forth a coffeepot and broiling-stick, also coffee, freshly killed deer meat, and corn-bread, and in a very few minutes had a repast prepared, which although it might not have been fit for a king and to the king's own liking, was highly satisfactory to the demands of the tired horseman's excellent appetite.

"That's a queer lot over there!" he mused, as he partook of his meal, "and I'll be hanged if I know hardly what to make of them. One thing is sure, however, De Campion can't bulldoze me with his 'blarsting' or 'cussing.' The girl who guided me here I rather like, but the rest of 'em!—Well, we will wait and see. There's no telling what a few hours may bring forth!"

CHAPTER III.

A GRANTED REQUEST.

ALTHOUGH he could not exactly understand why, Bristol was assailed with a suspicion that there was an undisclosed something concerning the tourists' party that he did not yet know—a something that was not altogether right—a something that perhaps might not bear investigation.

Ostensibly the party were tourists, doing the Rockies in search of pleasure. That was nothing startling, considering the picturesque beauties of the grand old mountain range, which have attracted, and ever will continue to attract nature-loving sight-seers from all civilized countries.

But, pretty Miss Betty had asserted that De Campion was a spiritualist in belief, and had come to these parts in quest of a buried treasure.

Why, then, was he so anxious to leave the basin of the crystal lake, than which no more desirable camping spot could be found for miles around?

This was the question Dick asked himself, as after supper, he lay upon the grass and smoked his pipe.

Surely the scenery was all that an artist could desire, while there was a plenitude of grass for grazing purposes, and lake and mountain gave every promise of plenty of game.

What more could tourists desire?

"It is such a spot as a hermit well might choose for his home," Deadwood Dick mused, as he lay alternately watching the tourists' camp, and the silvery ripples of the water, as they chased each other to and fro. "Altho' I was never here, before, I somehow seem at home here. Perhaps it is the extreme beauty of the night which gives me the feeling of contentment."

And a glorious night it was, indeed.

The gentle breeze that souged down into the basin from between the mountain peaks, was fraught with the odor of the pines; the air was invigorating, and Luna never shone more brightly or benignly.

The "Sawed-off" Mountain, before mentioned, was a picture in itself, as it rose almost perpendicularly from the water's edge, like some imposing monument.

"That's certainly an odd formation!" Dick said, aloud, "and if I remain long in this vicinity, I'll endeavor to see what it looks like on top!"

"I would like to know myself!"

The words were uttered so close to where Dick was reclining that he involuntarily started, and gazing behind him, beheld dark Gerald De Campion standing near by.

"Ah! is it you, Mr. De Campion? I believed myself quite alone!" and Dick rose to a sitting posture.

"It is I, Gerald De Campion," was the reply, "but not Mr. De Campion, you know. I tired of the camp, and took a notion to intrude here, thinking you might be lonely."

Dick laughed at the idea.

"Loneliness is something that bothers me little, even in the deepest solitude," he replied. "However, I am glad you came. In lieu of a chair, I shall have to invite you to a seat on the ground."

Gerald threw himself down, in a careless way, and proceeded to fill his pipe, in the mean time surveying the young horseman rather inquiringly.

"What do you think of the old man?" he finally asked.

"Your father?"

"Yes."

"Why I don't know. I haven't had time to form opinions of any sort yet."

"Nonsense. You're one of these fellows who

does not require an hour to make up his mind. The old man did not make much out of you, and consequently is wroth!"

"Indeed? Well, I am sorry for that."

"You needn't be. You acted right in not acceding to his request. He is inclined to be overbearing of late, and you gave him the proper set-back. There's no sense of leaving here in a hurry. It's a garden spot of nature, and the only decent camping-place we've had for a month. In fact, I have reasons for objecting to leaving here, just yet, and thought I'd post you to that extent. The truth is, the old man don't know what he does want, so it's hardly worth your while to pay any attention to his expressed wishes."

Dick did not see that he was called upon to make any reply, and so remained silent.

After a brief silence, Gerald went on:

"No, the old man is stuck on the widow, and she's got him completely under her thumb. If it wasn't for her daughter, Editha, I believe I'd be tempted to—but never mind what. The woman is an adventuress, and all she cares for is a whack at the De Campion fortune. Humph! we shall see whether she will succeed or not!" and the dark eyes of the speaker emitted a wicked glitter, it struck Dick.

"You refer to Mrs. Walsingham De Blandford, I take it?" Dick said.

"Mrs. Walsingham De Fiddlesticks!" was the retort. "She's a fraud of the first water, that woman is—a female lobbyist, whom the old man met in Washington, and likewise professes to be a spiritual medium, and it is through the latter imposition that she got a hold upon my father. He was for many years a believer in spiritualism, but, by persistent efforts, we had virtually talked him out of the craze until he met this woman. Since then we have lost all control over him, while this adventuress has held him completely under her thumb, and even caused him to promise to marry her. Can you then wonder that I detest her?"

"Well, no, I can't say that I wonder a bit," Dick replied; "but I do wonder that a strong man like your father should be deceived by such a person."

"Well, he does believe in her, and nothing either Noel or I can say will change his mind," Gerald replied, bitterly.

"So fully has the schemer got him under her influence, that I understand they intend to be married as soon as they reach a point where a minister or a justice of the peace can be found. If the woman becomes his wife, what, I ask you, will be the result? She will continue to keep him under her thumb until she gets his fortune away from him or he dies—in which event he will leave everything to her."

"I see, I see," Dick assented. "I can understand how you feel. I should feel the same if I were in your place."

"I doubt not you would. But, sir, this marriage must not take place!"

"If your father is so thoroughly in the woman's power, how are you to prevent it?"

"The only way to prevent it at present, is to prevent the party leaving this place. The trails that brought us here are long and labyrinthian, and none but an experienced mountain-man could find the way to the eastern slope of the Rockies. One thing is certain, neither of our party, except it were Noel and myself, would have the courage to attempt such a thing."

"So, Bristol, although an utter stranger, I want to ask a favor of you. You will see that, as sons of Major De Campion, it is not natural for us to want this adventuress to wheedle our parent out of his fortune, thereby leaving us, as it were, upon our uppers. We do not yearn for the old man to die, nor covet his wealth while he lives, but we do consider that we have a fortune at stake, and that, when our parent dies, his belongings should belong to us. Am I not reasonably right? Are we not rightfully our father's heirs, rather than this impostor—this gross adventuress, who calls herself Mrs. Walsingham De Blandford?"

"Most assuredly. No one would think of gainsaying that fact."

"Thank you, old boy! I thought you would agree with me on that point!" dark Gerald said, gratefully, putting out his hand. "I think I read you aright the moment I set eyes on you, that you were a brave, whole-souled fellow—now I know it. And, now, for the request, which, maybe, you will refuse. Promise me that, no matter how much you may be importuned or tempted with reward, you will not act as guide for our party out of this place, for the present—until I consent. I am asking a great deal of you, but I am asking as a friend and a brother!"

Dick was silent for a moment, considering the request seriously, and then replied:

"I think I understand you, De Campion, that, by keeping your party here, in the basin, for awhile, will be the means of postponing the threatened marriage?"

"That's it, exactly. So long as I can keep them away from a minister, why, there's less danger of her getting hold of the fortune."

"But, you cannot always hope to keep them here."

"Oh! certainly not. But it will give me a chance to plan for their ultimate separation. That woman has a dark history, and I hope to be able to get a grip on her that will cause her to let up on the old man!"

"I see. Well, I hope you will succeed; and, as for your request, I cheerfully grant it."

"Thank you! Thank you! I shall henceforth consider myself under deepest obligations to you, and so will my brother Noel!" Gerald declared, earnestly.

"How will the other members of your party like remaining here?" Dick asked.

"Oh! it won't make any difference to them; but if it does, it don't matter. With one exception, or rather with two exceptions, they don't amount to much. The exceptions are my brother and Bessie."

"Miss Bly, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Very fine looking girl!" Dick observed.

"Do you think so? Well, perhaps she is."

A peculiar something in Gerald's tone caused Dick to dart him an inquiring glance. The expression of the dark young man's visage, however, betrayed no emotion of any sort.

"I wonder if Miss Bess is anything to him?" Dick wondered. "It is possible I may have been treading on forbidden ground when I spoke of her good looks."

They conversed for some time longer, on various topics, and then Gerald rose to go.

"I guess I'll get back to camp, now," he said. "By the way, when you make a trip to the top of 'Sawed-off' Mountain, which Bet has christened Mount Mab, I would like to accompany you."

"All right; I'll let you know before I go," Dick replied.

As he spoke, both men involuntarily gazed toward the mountain in question, and as they did so, each uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

What they saw was enough to elicit an exclamation from any one!

CHAPTER IV.

A QUEER COMMUNICATION.

STANDING upon the mountain-peak in bold relief, as the mellow moonlight fell upon him, and plainly discernible from the basin below, was a man.

He was evidently well advanced in years, for his hair and beard were extremely long, and he appeared to support himself by the aid of a staff taller than himself.

His attire, as near as could be determined, was of buckskin, the several seams being fringed with squirrels' tails, and he wore neither head nor foot-coverings.

He appeared to be surveying the encampment of the tourists below him; and altogether, he looked rather weird and spectral, as the moonlight fell upon him.

"Hello! Who the blazes is that?" ejaculated Gerald De Campion.

"Give it up!" Dick replied. "It appears we are not the only ones who know of this garden-spot. Wait, and I'll get my field-glass, and bring the old man closer."

From his saddle-sack he brought forth the glass in question, and leveled it at the figure on the summit of Mount Mab.

He saw a man of sixty years or more, with long gray hair and beard, and kindly countenance—a man of unusual stature and muscular development; a man who, were he clothed in civilian garb, might have been termed handsome.

His belt fairly bristled with knives and pistols, and, judging from his herculean build, he was a man of prodigious strength.

There was nothing particularly out of the ordinary about him, except it was his wilderness costume. He seemed absorbed in curiosity, as he watched the scene below.

"Well, what do you make of him?" Gerald asked eagerly.

"Oh! he's human!" Dick replied, as he passed over the glass to the Briton. "From appearances, I should put him down as some mountain hermit."

"Just what I judge!" Gerald assented. "Ha! look!"

He returned the glass to Dick, who once more leveled it at the "sawed-off" plateau, to discover that the old man of the mountain was not alone.

There stood by his side a very short but heavily-built person—a dwarf, not over three and a half feet high, almost as big one way as he was the other, and a head of enormous size, covered with reddish hair, which grew bristlingly erect.

"My eyes!" ejaculated De Campion, "a very Caliban!"

"He certainly is not a beauty. Looks as if he was the gnome of these hills, I should say," remarked Dick.

"This garden-spot won't prove such a paradise after all, if a few gnomes and goblins turn up."

"Maybe not," Dick admitted. "The two up there are an odd pair, and their appearance may mean trouble for all intruders on these domains."

Further remarks were interrupted, just then, as pretty Bessie Bly came running up, all but out of breath.

"Oh! Mr. Gerald, will you please come to the camp?" she cried. "Every one is very much frightened by the figures on the mountain, and aunt went off into a dead faint the moment she saw that strange old man."

"She did, eh? Well, I don't know as that fact concerns me particularly," Gerald replied. "I reckon she'll come to all right if they douse a bucket of water over her."

"But the major wants to see you immediately, Mr. Gerald. Won't you please come?"

"To be sure, I'll do almost anything to please you, my fair Bet," De Campion replied, gallantly. "So come along," and bidding Deadwood Dick good-night, they hurried away toward the tourists' camp.

In the mean time Dick saw the old man and the dwarf suddenly disappear from the mountain-top, and almost simultaneously there appeared upon the moonlit surface of the lake an apparition even more startling than had been that upon the mountain.

This time it was that of a man, standing erect upon the water, near the center of the lake—a man clad in a flowing robe of white, with long white hair and beard, and apparently the same in features as those of the old man of the mountain.

He stood, silently erect, a dim, filmy apparition, the upraised index finger of his right hand pointing heavenward.

The waters gleamed and rippled all about the strange spectacle, and could be seen 'way beyond it, so there seemed no room for doubt that it was really standing on the water, as it appeared.

The sight was decidedly startling and ghostly, and Dick, although not credulous as to things supernatural, could not help feeling awed and considerably mystified.

"I'll be hanged if I know what to make of this!" he mused, watching the specter, or whatever it was, with intense curiosity. "I never saw a ghost yet that couldn't be laid, nor did I ever see a human being who could stand on the surface of the water."

Involuntarily he reached for his rifle, but before he could draw it to him, the sharp report of a weapon broke the stillness of the night, coming from the direction of the other camp.

Some one of the tourists had fired at the apparition.

The report of the weapon was followed by a shriek of eldritch laughter, and the apparition suddenly disappeared—vanished into nothingness, as it were.

"Jupiter Ammon! That beats the deck!" was Dick's ejaculation. "There was some devilry about that, or else we are indeed in a spook-infested locality. But although I don't take any stock in that nonsense, yet how is one to account for what I have just seen?"

The question was unsolved, even if, for several hours, the detective lay turning it over in his mind.

That the old man on the mountain, and the apparition on the lake were one and the same in appearance there was no gainsaying; yet, one was human, and the other certainly could not be, for how could a human being stand upon the waters, and go and come at will, as the apparition had done?

"There's a mystery here," Dick decided, "and I feel it is for me to solve it. Else why were my footsteps guided hither? To-morrow I will take the initiatory toward working out the solution."

And, with this conclusion, he went to sleep.

Fatigued from his long journey, he slept long and soundly, and when, at length, he awakened, day had long since dawned, but the sky was clouded over with dull gray, and the breeze that soured down into the basin had the "feel" of rain.

Dick was aroused from his slumbers by some one shaking him by the arm, and raising himself to a sitting posture, he found, standing beside him, Bugstein the Jew.

"Ah! mine frient, you vas one sound sleeper," the Israelite declared, with a grin. "You vas all der world like mine brother Isaac, vot ish deadt."

"To blazes with your brother Isaac," Dick growled. "What do you mean by disturbing me?"

"Mine frient, I beg you vil not get excited mit me. I vas sent here py the major."

"Oh! you was, eh? Well, what do you want?"

"Noddinks vor mineseluf, mine frient—noddinks vor mineseluf. It vas der major vot vant you."

"What does he want?"

"You will excuse me, but I haluf to gif dot up. He dells me vot I dells you—dot he wants to see you righd away off quick."

"Why the blazes don't he come to me if he wants to see me? I don't know that I am at his beck and call."

"But, mine frient, der major haluf der gout purty bad, you know, andt he cannot got around so spry like yourseluf."

"Well, you go back and tell him I'll come over after I get my breakfast," Dick replied, and the son of Abraham took his departure. Dick set about preparing his morning repast, but not making the least effort to hurry the operation. To quicken his visit to the major was not in his programme for morning exercise.

From the lake, with his ever-ready hook and line, he caught a fine mess of fish, and these, when broiled, and washed down with coffee, made a hearty and tempting repast for a mountain wayfarer.

After breakfast he sauntered over to the tourists' camp, to find the party seated in a circle, and, from appearances, holding a confab, or council.

All hands looked worried, except it were Gerald, who lounged idly upon the grass, apparently quite at ease.

"You sent for me, I believe," Dick said, addressing De Campion, pater.

"Yes, I did," was the uncivil reply. "You didn't hurry yourself very much, either, to comply with my request."

"I'm not aware that I was particularly called upon to do so," Dick retorted. "I had my breakfast to get, and, when possible, I always make it a point to have breakfast before business."

"Humph! You blarsted Yankees are entirely too independent, considering your stations and class standing. However, let that pass. We want to know how soon you will be ready to guide our party out of the mountains."

"I don't know that I've any intention of guiding your party at all, sir. My course lies to the northward through the range, when I leave here; but it is quite probable that I shall remain in this basin for some time to come."

"Do you mean to say that you will not act as our escort, if you are well paid for it?"

"Money is no object to me, and for the present I propose to remain here."

"I'll give you two hundred dollars to act as our guide."

Dick laughed.

"I couldn't think of taking your offer, Major De Campion, he said, dryly. "Did I intend to take the back trail, I should not ask a cent to act as your guide; but, as I have made up my mind to stay here, ten times two hundred dollars would not effect a change of my purpose."

"Curse it, what is the object in your infernal stubbornness? Do you think to bleed me out of a larger sum, you—"

"Take care!" cried Dick, with flashing eyes; "don't get uncivil in your language, or you may have cause to regret it!"

"Ha! you dare to threaten me?"

"I threaten nothing. I simply suggest that you will find it best to not say what had better be left unsaid. I have an object in desiring to remain in Beelzebub's Basin, as this mountain pocket may aptly be termed, but, my object in no wise concerns the depletion of your apparently plethoric purse. If you do not desire to remain here, I see no alternative but for you to find your way out of the mountains, as best you can."

"That's impossible. We would get worse lost than we are now!"

"Then, why not be content to remain where you are, for the present? Here you have plenty of fish and game, and there is nothing to prevent your getting along nicely. Perhaps, in time, some ranger will happen along, who will be glad to take your money and guide you back to civilization again."

"No! no! It is of the utmost importance that we tarry here no longer. The spirits of those who are dead and gone, have warned us to go, and if we disobey them, terrible things will happen."

"Spirits in a horn! If you believe in such nonsense, you deserve to get into trouble. True spirits do not bother themselves about things here below!"

"We know better. The good widow, here, is a powerful medium, and in constant communication with the spirit world."

"So she says, I suppose; but, I say the widow is humbugging you, if she is stuffing you with that kind of fodder. Spirits that have any circus in this world are those manufactured by worldly corporations and I'll be blamed if I believe the aristocratic Widow De Blandford is connected with a distillery!"

"Sir! you are a low-lived insulting puppy!" cried the widow, growing apoplectic with rage, "and if you do not retract your words I'll have you severely punished!"

"Ah, indeed! How choice you are in your language. But, I retract nothing, madam. I'm as plain spoken, as an indictment, and if the arrangement displeases you, it is no fault of mine!"

"Gentlemen!" cried the widow, her rage increasing, "are you men, that will allow this insolent wretch to talk to me in this shameful manner?"

"If it wasn't that my cussed gout is so cussed painful, I'd thrash him within an inch of his cussed life!" the major declared, bristling like a turkey gobbler.

"Surely you will avenge me, Mr. Todd—Mr. Gerald—Mr. Noel!"

"You can count me out!" Noel said, "for I'm not one of the fighting sort!"

"Nor I!" hastily put in Raphael De Percy. "I think it's weally herwible to fight. It's so vulgar, don'cher know!"

Mrs. W. Walsingham De Blandford turned, as a last resort, despairingly to dark Gerald, who still lazily reclined upon the grass, seeking solace from his meerschaum.

"Gerald—Mr. De Campion, I trust—"

"Mrs. De Blandford, I am quite adverse to engaging in a quarrel with Mr. Bristol, whom I admire—not even for your most gracious sake!"

Baffled all around, the madam glared at the lone traveler once more furiously.

"If it weren't for the shocking disgrace of the thing, I would publicly chastise you, myself!" she averred. "You deserve to be beaten within an inch of your life, you viper!"

Dick's only reply was a smile, as he turned to the major, who had drawn off his shoe, and was engaged in nursing his gouty foot.

"I am sorry, Major De Campion, that I cannot be of service to you in the capacity of a guide," he said, "and trust you will make up your mind to settle down where you are, and make the best of matters, until something turns up in your favor. If anything turns up, that you or your estimable party needs any fighting assistance, I am, my dear sir, quite at your command, and yours truly, Richard M. Bristol, otherwise Deadwood Dick Junior!" and so saying, he turned to depart.

But, the major called him back. "Hold on!" he said. "Perhaps it will be better to have you as a friend than as an enemy. I want your opinion in regard to the man and dwarf on the mountain, and the specter on the lake."

"Really, I haven't formed enough of a conclusion, to be able to express an opinion. The thing on the lake, whatever it was, is a mystery, and the two men on the mountain-top are little less. Just what the mystery is, none of us, of course, now know. My object in remaining here, is to find out."

"I see! I see!" and a troubled expression mounted the major's brow. "It's the spirits that have control of these cussed surroundings, and if we remain here, we are doomed, one and all!"

"Oh! bosh! Dry up on that nonsense! Who fired at the apparition, last night?"

"My son, Noel did!" was the reply, "but 'gainst my express commands not to shoot, and, as a result, incurred the enmity of the spirits. On awaking, this morning, I found this warning pinned to my garments. Read it, and then

tell me if you wonder at my desire to quit this valley!"

As he spoke the major handed Dick a sheet of ordinary writing paper, on which was written the following, in red ink, and evidently with a quill pen.

"Thou hast come, without leave or license, into the sacred hunting-grounds of the Silent Tongues;—the one spot on earth set aside for them, thou hast desecrated with thy presence. In so doing, thou hast committed an unpardonable sin, and thou art punished accordingly, by being forbidden to go forth alive from Beelzebub's Basin, where thou art, now. Disobedience to this command, will see thee come to harm, for so surely as ye seek to leave this place without my permission, so shall ye be cut into pieces, and thy flesh fed to the wolves that hover in the dark recesses."

"One of thy flock is doomed, and the days of this one are numbered. Who this may be, thou knowest not, but this guilty one knoweth, and in secret trembles, for the hand of vengeance stayeth not."

"If by wisdom, thou seekest not to bring wrath upon thyself, by disobedience to my command, it is well; but, woe unto you that believeth not in THE OLD MAN OF MAB MOUNTAIN."

Deadwood Dick read this strange communication over twice, before allowing his eyes to leave the paper, then, after a swift glance over his interested audience, he began, in a clear, resonant voice, and read it aloud. This done he refolded the paper, and returned it to the major, by another swift glance sweeping the faces before him, and noting that Mrs. W. Walsingham De Blandford had changed color—from flushed and angry red to a gray pallor.

"You may shoot me for a coyote if that ain't a queer old love-letter!" he observed. "But, as it was evidently written by a crank, it is scarcely worth your while to pay any attention to it. If, however, there is any prospect of trouble, you have but to send for me, and perhaps I can stave it off. Anyhow, you had better set to work, and prepare to stay here awhile. The tone of the letter is threatening, and I'd not try to brave it until we know more!"

"How is it that you said this place might aptly be called Beelzebub's Basin, and in this communication the Old Man so denominates it?" the major demanded, suspiciously.

"There you have me!" Dick frankly confessed. "I know it is a very singular coincidence that both I and the author of the warning should call it by the same name, but, it is a coincidence, for I swear I know no more of the past history of this place, or of the strange Old Man of the Mountain, than yourselves, if as much. The title of 'Beelzebub's Basin' came to me as I gazed at the apparition on the lake. This is the only explanation in my power to give."

Dick then sauntered back to his own camp in a very "brown study," indeed, for he had much more to think of now than when he first awakened that morning.

CHAPTER V.

"A STITCH IN TIME SAVES NINE."

THE wide-awake Dick during the day, moved his camp to where a little motte of oaks ran down from the mountain-side to the water's edge. In this grove he found shade for himself and Electric, and occupied his time in putting up a small tent, the canvas of which his pack contained—but all the while cogitating over the mystery of the Old Man.

"It struck me on first reading that message," he mused, "that it was the work of Gerald, written with the intent of frightening his father into remaining in the Basin, but, when I gave him an inquiring glance, he shook his head negatively, evidently comprehending my suspicion."

"The Old Man of Mount Mab is a mystery. In his letter he pronounces the doom of one of the party of tourists, and, if I am not greatly mistaken, that one is Mrs. De Blandford. Else why did she faint last night when she saw the old man on the mountain, and why did her florid countenance grow pale this morning when I read aloud the message? I now firmly believe she knows the Old Man, and that he knows her, and the threat in his communication is intended for her. Gerald has told me that the woman has a dark past; but how am I to find out what that past is? Is it any of my business to try to find out? I believe it is. I believe that woman is bad to the core, and if she is not closely watched, she will do some one serious harm. She is not a weak-minded woman. On the contrary, she is strong-minded and stubborn, and vicious and treacherous, too, I suspect. Perhaps Bessie could tell me much worth knowing, if she were so inclined."

Thus musing, he allowed the afternoon to drag by.

At the tourists' camp there was no perceptible stir during the afternoon.

The sun poured down so warmly into the Basin, that the stranded land voyageurs kept to their tents for shade.

Night set in quite early in the Basin, owing to the extreme height of the surrounding mountains, and the fact that the sun was hidden from view, long before it was time to set below the true horizon.

Just as the last rays were lingering in the Basin, Dick got up his fishing apparatus, and, sitting upon the bank of the lake, began to cast out for fish for his evening meal.

The pretty sheet of water was fairly alive with the mountain trout, and to catch them was but pastime. As yet, he had not seen any of the tourists engaged in fishing, and took it for granted that either they did not know how to fish, or were unprovided with the necessary tackle; so he concluded to catch a mess for his neighbors.

He was thus occupied, and had just landed a fine specimen of mountain trout, when he heard a footstep, and turning, beheld Miss Betty smiling down upon him.

"Ah, is it you, Miss Bly?" he said. "How are matters over at the camp?"

The girl shrugged her pretty shoulders.

"About the same as usual," she replied. "Aunt is crazy to leave the place, but Mr. De Campion won't consent to make a move without you to act as guide."

"And so he has sent you over to intercede with me, eh?"

"Oh, no. I came of my own accord. I saw you fishing, and so I slipped away from camp and came here. I suppose I'll get a scolding when I go back, but then I don't care; I am used to that."

"A scolding, eh? Pray, who should scold you? Are you not your own mistress?"

"Not yet. I am not of age, you know, and until I am, aunt is my guardian."

"Ah, I see. Not a very desirable one, either, I take it," Dick remarked, inquiringly.

Bessie made no reply, but seated herself upon the bank, a few feet distant from the fisherman.

"You seem to have great luck fishing," she said.

"I'm catching a mess for your camp as well as my own."

"Oh, won't that be nice! We've had nothing but ham and coffee since we've been camped here."

"By the way, Miss Bly," Dick said, as he recast his line into the water, "I have taken quite an interest in you. Would you mind telling me of your past life? Something tells me that it has been of more than usual interest."

She gazed at him in evident great surprise.

"What in the world ever caused you to think that?" she asked.

"That is something I am powerless to tell you, more than that I intuitively feel that yours has been an interesting experience."

"Rather an unpleasant one," Bess replied, sadly—"that's all."

"Tell me about it, won't you please—and about your aunt?"

"Why about her?"

"Because I would like to know. There can be no harm in it."

Bessie was silent a moment, before answering.

"I don't know that I can tell of much that will interest you," she said, presently. "I was born in Richmond, Virginia, and came of a good family. My home, until not long ago, was at our family homestead, Live Oaks. My mother was of French descent, and my father was a New Englander. During the late rebellion, he entered the Federal service, and rose to the rank of colonel."

"My early life was spent at school, and barren of any incident that would interest you. Mother and I lived quietly at Live Oaks, with the servants, for, after the closing of the war, father was away from home most of the time, in the West, where he embarked in various mining enterprises. It was seldom that he came home to Live Oaks more than once a year, and then only to remain for a few weeks."

"He made money rapidly, and from time to time deposited it in a bank in Richmond, where mother was allowed to draw enough to keep us comfortably."

"The last time I saw my father, was five years ago, when I was thirteen years of age. In kissing mamma and I good-by then, he said he expected to be back within six months' time."

and settle down for good at Live Oaks. Before his departure, he made his will, and left it in the hands of his lawyer, but neither mamma or I knew what disposition it made of his estate.

"Shortly after papa's departure, poor mamma took sick; then aunty came on from Washington, and, without invitation from any one, took charge of the household. I confess I did not like it a bit, and would have much preferred to do the overseeing myself; but I didn't want to worry mamma.

"Well, we wrote and telegraphed to papa of mamma's illness, when the doctors hinted that her recovery was improbable, but failed to get any answer from him whatever.

"Then, as mamma gradually grew worse, she sent Aunt Sarah out West in search of papa, which left me in charge at Live Oaks. After an absence of a month, Aunt Sarah returned, with the announcement that papa had just died, at Denver, of small-pox, where he had been buried, as the railroad authorities refused to forward the remains over the road, for fear of contagion.

"Instead of discreetly keeping papa's death from mamma, as she should have done, Aunt Sarah told mamma all about it, when she was lying very low, and the shock killed her. Oh! Mr. Bristol, it's a terrible thing to lose both of one's parents so suddenly. I know it is wicked, but I am tempted to believe that Aunt Sarah told mamma, in hopes that the shock would kill her!"

"I haven't a doubt of it!" Dick unhesitatingly declared. "I am pretty apt, as a rule, to form correct opinions of a person, and my impression of your aunt is that she is a schemer of unusual effrontery. But do not let me interrupt you. Go on."

"There's little more to tell you. After mother's death, a will purporting to be my father's, was produced in court and proved. It gave me our country home, Live Oaks, with stock and appurtenances, and one thousand dollars in money; the remainder of the large bank account to my mother, if she be living; if not, to my aunt, who was to assume guardianship of me until I had attained my majority. Thus, you see, I was practically disinherited; for Live Oaks, with all its belongings, would bring but a few thousand dollars, if put under the auctioneer's hammer. The old servants have all gone, and the dear old place I loved so well, and where I spent my girlhood days, has fallen into disuse and decay. We spent last summer there, but it is no longer what it used to be."

There were tears, in the girl's eyes, as he finished speaking.

"I deeply sympathize with you in your affliction, I assure you. It seems to me that the tone of your father's will has not the right ring. Have you suspected that it might be a forgery?" Dick asked.

"I have. But, how am I to prove that my suspicions are correct? The lawyer who drew the will, and the witnesses thereto, all swore to its authenticity; so had I raised any objections, they would have been overruled."

"How has your aunt treated you?"

"Well, for a time after mamma died, she treated me very harshly, and not only deprived me of money, but made me wait upon her and my cousin the same as though I was a servant. This, however, was before we left Live Oaks. When she received intimation that a rich relative of mine had picked me out as his destined heir, her manner underwent a great change. She treated me more kindly; we moved to Washington, where she liberally supplied me with dress and pocket money, and allowed me to finish my regular school education. So that, of late, I have no particular grievance to complain of except that aunty continually urged that poor fool, Toddles, to annoy me with his protestations of love. She wants me to marry him, for he, too, has prospects of coming into a fortune soon, and she knows the poor fellow is just weak-minded enough to let her boss him around."

"I see. She's got an eye both on your prospective inheritance, and on Toddles's too?"

"So it appears."

"One would naturally suppose she would plot for her own daughter to marry the elegant young swain?"

"Oh! no! She's got different plans for Editha, I infer. Should Aunt Sarah fail to secure the major—there's many a slip, 'twixt cup and lip, you know—it would be disastrous not to have a hold on the De Campion fortune. Therefore, she is endeavoring to match Editha with Noel, who, in event of De Campion's not making a will in favor of my aunt, will probably be his father's heir."

"To the exclusion of Gerald?"

"I think so. Gerald is not popular, either with his father or Aunt Sarah, and that's the reason, I think, he will not stand much of a show. It don't matter so much about Gerald, however, for he is quite well off in his own right."

"What do you think of the strange communication of the old man?" Dick casually questioned.

"Indeed, I don't know what to think. Do you?"

"No. There is a mystery behind it all, which, I believe, is in some way associated with your aunt. How long ago did your aunt's husband die?"

"Oh! a good many years ago."

"Did he die a natural death?"

"Oh! yes. He died of consumption, I believe."

"Was his name De Blandford?"

"No. His name was George Smithers. De Blandford is a name of my aunt's own choosing."

"Ah! yes. I believe you told me so, once before. Your aunt never had but one husband, then?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Miss Bly, did it ever occur to you that your father may not be dead?"

Bessie started, and gazed at him, eagerly.

"How can you ask? You surely do not think so?" she asked.

"I simply asked you the question," he replied.

"Please answer."

"Well, I have tried to think of him as dead, and I have mourned his loss. Still, to be candid, I have felt that there was something back of it all that I did not know. If you like, I will explain."

"Certainly. You can freely make me your confidant, and, if I can be of any service to you, command me. Somehow, it strikes me that you have been made a victim of your aunt's machinations, and if I can help you, I shall be only too glad to do so."

"Thank you. You are very kind. I do partly believe that papa is still living, and I will tell you why. As I have previously told you, my aunt, cousin, and myself, spent last summer at my old home, Live Oaks. Just why we went there I do not know, except it was aunt's express wish. To be sure, the old house was still furnished, but the servants were gone, and we had to wait upon ourselves."

"During July I went to spend a week with a former schoolmate, a few miles distant from Live Oaks, leaving Aunt Sarah and Editha behind. During my absence something very singular occurred. The particulars I have been able to get are very meager, but they are as follows:

"While I was away from Live Oaks, a man made his appearance in the neighboring town of M—, and announced that he was my father, Colonel Bly. He was a thin, emaciated, and wretched-looking tramp, and no one credited his story. He was ragged and penniless, and not at all like Colonel Bly, so people said."

"My aunt, hearing of the man, hastened to M—, and caused his arrest, charging him with breaking into the mansion at Live Oaks and attempting to murder her."

"There was a brief trial, and the testimony of my aunt and Editha secured a conviction, and the poor tramp was sent to the penitentiary for six months."

"I heard of this before my return to Live Oaks, and secretly paid a visit to the penitentiary to get a look at the man, in the firm belief that he was my father. But when I arrived there I learned that the prisoner had escaped from prison, and probably sought safety in some other part of the country. So I gave up all hope, and returned to Live Oaks, without telling aunt of my visit to the prison."

"Did you find out if the story of the man's breaking into Live Oaks was correct?"

"The only person on the premises, during my absence, aside from aunt and Editha, was the man to whom the farm is rented, and he told me, under a pledge of secrecy, that he didn't believe that any man had broken into Live Oaks at all, as no application had been made to him for assistance, such as would naturally have been the case."

"Just so," Dick assented. "The man who returned to Live Oaks was your father, without a doubt, and your aunt swore falsely against him, to get him out of the way."

"Oh, Mr. Bristol, do you really believe it can be true?"

"Miss Bessie, I do, candidly. Do you think you would recognize your father if you were to see him?"

"Not if he were so changed as this tramp appeared, according to such description as I was able to get of him. My father, as I last remember him, when I was thirteen years of age, was a handsome, beardless, young-looking man. Although he was about forty-three years of age at the time, he didn't look thirty. On the other hand, this tramp was apparently much older than my father would have been, and evidently had led a wild and dissipated life."

"I suppose you have no picture of your father?"

"I have, but Aunt Sarah has got it. One day, when I was studying the face, she snatched the photograph away from me, and has kept it ever since. Whenever I have asked for it she has told me she would only give it to me when I promised to marry De Percy Todd. I know where she keeps it, however, and think I might be able to get it, if you would like to see it."

"Do so, by all means. From what I have learned, I have hopes that I may be able to find your father, and bring about the discomfiture of your scheming aunt."

"Oh! if you could only do this, sir, I am sure you would have my everlasting gratitude!" Bessie said, fervently.

"And I am sure I should prize your gratitude very much," Dick returned.

He soon had a fine extra mess of fish landed, and then, carrying a goodly portion of them, he made his way to the tourists' camp, in company with Bessie, and presented the speckled beauties to the major.

He could scarcely have done anything that would have pleased the recipient better, and was thanked, accordingly.

He remained at the camp a few minutes, and then returned to his own "squat," as he termed it, where a surprise awaited him.

It was in the shape of a note, which had been fastened to his saddle, and bore the following significant warning:

"A stitch in time saves nine. You will need more than nine stitches, if you don't desist from undue familiarity!"

CHAPTER VI.

A TERRIBLE THREAT.

THERE was no signature to this strange message, but the chirography was of the masculine order, and that of a hand evidently skilled.

Had he returned to camp, and found it turned into a city, Deadwood Dick could scarcely have been more surprised.

Who had left the note there, and what did it mean?

These were questions he could not answer, at first, but, after a few minutes' deliberation, light began to dawn upon him.

"Some one of the tourists is the author of this *billet-doux*," he commented, "and the odds are ten to one that it was Gerald De Campion. He was not visible about the camp when I accompanied Bessie there, and was probably here, while I was there. He saw me in conversation with Miss Bly—perhaps overheard what I said—and, is jealous! Ha! ha! Well, that beats the deck, for I don't believe the girl cares a continental fig about him!"

Dick was both amused and annoyed. He resolved, however, to pay no attention to the message, but carefully await and watch developments.

If Gerald penned the note, there was a possibility that he was as likely to be an enemy as a friend.

Several days passed—warm, sunny days, which, in the little mountain pocket, were very quiet and uneventful. The Old Man of the Mountain and his dwarf companion had not made a second appearance, nor had the apparition been seen upon the lake; so the monotony of camp life was practically unvaried.

Bessie came over to see Dick every night about sunset, and on her return always carried back with her a handsome string of fish.

Sometimes Noel and Editha accompanied her, but dark Gerald no longer favored the lone camp with his visits, and whenever Dick sauntered over to the De Campion Camp, Gerald always managed to be absent.

Major De Campion and his party evidently had settled down to the sensible conclusion of remaining where they were for the present, although the widow was vigorous in her denunciation of "that Dick Bristol."

Five days of this quiet sort of life, without an incident to vary the monotony, was beginning to have its effect even on Dick, who was not accustomed to such idleness for any great length of time. Then something occurred to change the aspect of affairs.

Bessie came hurrying over to Dick's camp on

the afternoon of the sixth day, in a state of unusual excitement.

"Oh, Mr. Bristol!" she cried, breathlessly, "there's a strange man in our camp, and we're all afraid of him! Would you mind coming over?"

"Certainly not," Dick replied, and thrusting a pair of revolvers into his belt, he accompanied the fair girl whom he was gradually growing to esteem very highly.

On their arrival at the De Campion Camp, they found it literally in possession of a gigantic, ruffianly specimen of the Western bullwhacker—an uncouth, ugly-visaged mortal, who, judging from his scars, had taken part in more than one desperate scrimmage.

He was parading about, with a strut of importance, and delivering himself of a fusillade of profanity that was something terrible to listen to.

"Who is this chap?" Dick asked of the major, before he essayed to interfere.

"The Lord only knows," groaned De Campion, who was perched high and dry upon the driver's seat of one of the coaches. "He's a bloody beast, whoever or whatever he is, and has been insulting us with the grossest sort of language. If you will drive him out of camp, I will give you twenty shillings."

"That's a magnanimous offer, I'm sure," Dick said, sarcastically; "but, as I am not for sale at that British price, I'll volunteer, after the American fashion, to attend to the matter free of charge!"

De Campion winced at this shot, but made no reply.

A glance about the camp satisfied Dick that dark Gerald was not present, unless he had taken refuge in one of the tents.

The bullwhacker had by this time noted Dick's arrival, and ceased his vociferations long enough to look the Wild West detective over from head to foot; then he advanced, a sinister leer upon his bloated, ugly visage.

"Hillo!" he cried, "who in thunder be you?"

"That don't matter," Dick replied. "The question is, who are you, and what do you mean by coming here and insulting these people, you overgrown loafer?"

The giant stared.

What did it mean?

How dare a mortal so inferior in size to himself, openly insult him?

Who was this cool, stern-eyed, youthful-looking individual, who had the nerve to face him, and be a very modern Hercules, and actually to call him a loafer?

The bullwhacker was, in truth, astonished, and glared at the young man as if he could not believe the evidence of his hearing.

He continued to glare at Dick for several seconds; then his features relaxed into a broad grin.

"Waal, I'll be cussed!" he ejaculated. "Shute me for a coyote ef I know'd thar war a crazy-tie in this hyer camp. When'd yer escape, Crazy?"

"You'll be apt to find out when if you do not account for your presence here," Dick replied. "Once more, Mister Loafer, I demand to know who you are, and what you want here."

"Oho! I war mistaken, hey? An' yer ain't crazy, an' ye meant it for 'rale, when ye called me an overgrown loafer?"

"That's just what I meant—a big loafer!"

"Then, by ther snort snakes o' Saucepan City, thar'll be blud on the face o' ther moon. Yer wanter know what be my name, an' what sort uv a Shanghi canary I am, do yer?"

"That's what I want to know, and don't want your gab nor your presence here either."

"Yer don't, hey? Yer durst talk that way ter me, ye leetle sawed-off son-of-a-gun—me, ther fire-vomickin' volcaner right down from Saucepan City! Man alive, yer don't know who yer torkin' to! Ye'r mad as a March hare, wif his tail stuck full o' cactus prickles! Yer don't seem ter realize that ye'r standin' on ther bevel-edge o' a 'arthquake, what'll open out an' swaller you like a Missourian does a half-pound slug o' terbaccer."

"'Ralely, I don't like ter say so, and blush to murmur at yer ignorance. I hadn't orter, but ef you'll get down an' kiss my feet, I'll be cussed ef I don't fergive ye for this once. For the luv o' Lucy, don't ye tremble when I tell ye I'm Peter Coffin, the terror of Saucepan City, an' ther only man who defrays the funeral expenses of every man he kills! Stranger, ye'r way behind ther times ef ye haven't heard o' me, for up at Saucepan City I've a private seminary whar I've already planted forty pilgrims, an' expect ter have to take up more land room, long afore snow falls!"

"Good heavings! How utterly horrible!" gasped Raphael De Percy Todd, cowering close to the majestic figure of the widow.

As for Deadwood Dick, he looked disgusted.

"You are a big-mouthed blowhard!" he said, "and the quicker you clear out from here the better it will be for you. We don't want men of your sort here, and, what's more, we won't have 'em. So pick up your heels and go, or you'll wish you hadn't come. D'ye hear? Go!"

"Snortin' Snakes! Me gol—me, ther great vomickin' volcaner o' Saucepan City? Waal, I reckon not—anyhow, not 'til I git ther secret. I'm hyer expressly for that purpose, an' ef I don't git it, Rome'll howl wuss than it ever did in the days o' Nero, who war one o' my ancestors. That secret I'll have, or the wolves will have a feast on every one o' ye, you bet! Ha! ha! ye don't know Peter! I'm known tho', an' them as knows me c'u'd tell ye so, ef they war alive to tell it. I'm bad medicine c'ar thru, an' ef ye don't want harm ter cum ter that gal thar"—with a malevolent glance at Bessie, "you'd better not 'rile Pete Coffin too fur."

"Thar's wolves not fur from beer, an' they ain't ordinary wolves, nuther. They're shet up in a pen an' starved 'til they're more ferocious than tigers. Thar ain't one wolf, but hundreds of 'em, an' they belong to Pete Coffin, ther Wolf King o' the Rockies. They know me, an' mind like a dorg, but they wouldn't stop at ceremony wif you 'uns, 'specially when they're dry an' hungry, an' I'll swar they be that now. It's nigh outer a month since I fed 'em on a feller what looks like him," pointing to De Percy Todd, "an' it didn't take five minutes for 'em to gobble him up, tooth and toe-nail, hat, boots an' all."

Somewhere in his travels, Deadwood Dick had heard a blood-curdling story told of the Wolf-Man of the Rockies, who preyed upon hunters and travelers by forcing them to disgorge their money, or fight a ravenous pack of wolves, an attempt that meant a horrible death.

Could this gigantic ruffian be this Wolf-Man?

The thought was not pleasant to contemplate.

Perhaps it would be better to go lightly in dealing with this fellow, than precipitate a possible calamity by angering him.

"What secret is it you want to know?" Dick demanded.

"I wanter know whar that secret mine is!"

"Secret mine? We know of no secret mine. Explain yourself, and perhaps we will understand what you are getting at."

"Oh! ye'r mighty innocent, aren't you? Waal, ye can't stuff that sort down me, nohow. But since ye let on ter be so ignorant, 'twon't be no harm ter tech ye up on ther solid facts o' the case. Mebbe you think I'm a fool, but I ain't. For a matter o' three years past thar's been a secret mine worked hereabouts by a gang known as the Silent Tongues, whose head cook an' bottle-washer aire a chap who calls hiself the Old Man. You may hev see'd him," pointing toward Mount Mab.

"Waal, me an' my side-partner hev tried ter find whar that mine war, an' hev spent vally ble time. We made up our minds ter have it, an' so, to puerect this hyer valley cr basin ag'in invasion, we organized our wolf army, an' taught 'em ther little biz. We keep 'em starved, an' when a good fat pilgrim meanders into this garden of Eden, we, as a general rule, gives our pets a feed. That's how it comes that this place war not inhabited until you 'uns come!"

Here the ruffian paused, with a wicked grin, to note the effect.

"Go on!" Deadwood Dick, ordered, sternly.

"Waal, suthin' over a month ago, my side-partner hed some bizness on the Eastern slope of the Rockies, and heerd of a rich old cuss as was a spiritualist, what war on a tour of the mountains, in search of a lost or secret mine; so Jim he managed to scrape up an acquaintance, an' he found out thet ther mine the old cuss war lookin' fur, war located heer. So he got a job as guide, and fetched the party here, an' left 'em. An' now, ef yer please, we're goin' ter know whar that mine aire, or we'll feed the whole caboodle o' ye to ther wolves!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE RESULT OF THE FIRST DUEL.

THE threat of the giant was one that could but inspire his listeners with a feeling of horror, and there were terrified exclamations from all except Dick Bristol, who managed to retain that stoical coolness so characteristic with him in times of danger.

His face was set and stern, however, and there was a dangerous gleam in his eyes.

His was not a pleasant position to say the least. The safety of the De Campion party depended largely on him.

"What was he to do?"

If this brutal wretch was provoked into carrying out his threat, the result was something horrible to contemplate.

While not so much worried about his own ability to protect himself, Dick knew that he could not defend the whole party against the attack of a ravenous horde of wolves that had been purposely starved.

"Your threat does not scare me!" he said, looking at the giant, "although I doubt not you are beast enough to do anything that is inhuman. As for the existence of a secret mine in this vicinity, your knowledge of it is quite exclusive. If such a mine exists, it is positively without the knowledge of this party, who were never in this basin before being guided and left helpless here by Cojeta Jim."

"Oh, ye can't stuff that sort o' thing down me!" Pete Coffin declared. "Mebbe you don't know whar it is—I don't say you do—but that old sucker does!"—pointing to De Campion, "an' ef he don't show up whar it is, he's got to take ther consenkences, you bet!"

Dick turned to the major.

"Mr. De Campion," he said, "you have heard what this ruffian claims. If you know where there's a secret mine hereabouts, you'd better tell, and save your party trouble which I am unable to avert."

"By the Lord Harry, I don't know of any secret mine here!" the major replied. "The spirits have told me there was a buried treasure in the Rocky Mountains, and that it was destined that I should find it. But, I have not found it yet, nor have I the slightest idea where it is located. But, I am sure it is not here."

"It is not here!" spoke up Mrs. Walsingham De Blandford, vigorously. "I have just received a spirit message that it is fifty miles further to the north, and that we will not find it by remaining here."

"You're an infernal fraud, and so is your alleged spiritualism!" Dick cried angrily, "and if you come to grief, the fault lies with you. You are a scheming adventuress, and have turned De Campion's head with your trash, and for a purpose, too, until he is little better than an imbecile. But, by the gods! you shall not succeed in that purpose—I swear it!"

Madam De Blandford shrugged her shoulders, and smiled disagreeably.

"You are a fool and a disbeliever!" she said, "and if you have ever chanced to read the Holy Writ, you will find that a disbeliever is one of the damned."

She then turned to the giant and leveled her magnetic gaze in full force upon him.

"Mr. Coffin!" she said, in her sweetest, oiliest tone, "you must not mind what that low ruffian says. Although I can assure you that we do not at present know that there is a mine here, I am the one who can find out. I am one of the most powerful mediums the world has ever known, and am constantly in communication with the spirits of the departed. If you will but grant me time, I can find out for you where the secret mine is, and the secret shall be transmitted to you alone."

Now this idea seemed to "hit the giant right where he lived," as the Western expression goes, and a greedy glitter entered his eyes.

"How long will it take fer ye to find out?" he demanded.

"That depends," the widow replied. "Like mortals, the spirits are sometimes communicative, and again they are non-communicative. However, the spirits with whom I have always dealt, have always been very kind to me, and I presume that, in a few days at the furthest, I can put you in possession of the valuable secret you desire—that is, of course, providing you cause my party no trouble or inconvenience. As for this wretch!"—pointing to Deadwood Dick—"he is not one of my party, and if you will undertake to give him a good beating, without resorting to outright bloodshed, I am sure the spirits will rejoice, and give me power to help you find the secret mine!"

"You bet I kin do him up!" Coffin declared, spitting on his hands, and flourishing his huge arms, in a pugilistic manner. "I'm the vomickin' volcaner from Saucepan City, an' kin lick any ten galoots, single-handed."

Dick made no reply, but stood quietly prepared for emergency.

To avert the precipitation of a calamity, he concluded to let the widow's influence weigh upon the giant. That he could beat the giant in a hand-to-hand encounter was by no means certain, but he was willing to take the chances, if

it would be the means of averting an encounter with the wolves.

As for Coffin he advanced a few steps nearer the detective, a diabolical grin upon his ugly countenance.

"Oh! me leetle banty, so ye dared ter call me pet names, did ye? Ye dared to insinuate that ther great vomickin' volcaneer o' Saucepan City war a loafer, did ye? Waal, I'm jest a-gwine ter make ye hump for that, sure's my name is Pete Coffin! I'm goin' ter knock them purty teeth down yer throat, and flatten yer nose 'til et's flatter'n a pancake what an elerfant's stepped on."

"Is that all?" coolly retorted Dick. "Well, if that's your programme, you'd better begin, if you expect to finish up the job before night. Spread your canvas, and sail right in, if you're spoiling for a breeze, and if I don't make you wish you'd steered for another port, my name is not Deadwood Dick!"

The giant paused abruptly, and looked astonished.

"Deadwood Dick—you!" he ejaculated.

"That's what I said!"

"Then, you're my very mutton, by the Lord Harry!" was the announcement. "I've hearn tell o' you, afore now, and as how folks war afeard o' you. But, I'll show ye thar's one who ain't afeard o' you, me gay young bantam!"

And with this he rushed at the young man, savagely.

It is probable that in his bullying career he had never met any one not afraid of him, owing to his prodigious size; consequently it must have been a surprise when, instead of seeing Deadwood Dick turn and run, he received a sledgehammer blow in the face from the detective's fist that completely knocked him off his feet.

Peter Coffin tumbled backward to the ground, with about as much grace as a log would have done, but, not being stunned, he hastily scrambled to his feet again and renewed the assault, with desperate ferocity, the blood spurting from his nostrils, and giving him an increased terrible appearance.

But although possessed of mighty strength, he lacked science and agility, and Deadwood Dick succeeded in cleverly parrying his savage lunges, at the same time raining a perfect tattoo of telling blows upon the brute's face and neck, a sort of treatment that soon began to weaken both the giants supply of wind and courage, and finally, another crushing blow from the Wild Westerner's right, laid Coffin once more upon his back.

His face now resembled an expanse of pounded beefsteak, and one eye was swollen entirely shut.

He made no attempt to regain his feet, this time, although he arose to a sitting posture.

"Well, have you got enough?" Dick demanded, "or do you want me to put on a finishing touch?"

"Cuss ye, I'll get squar' with ye!" the giant growled.

At this juncture, some one in the rear seized Dick by the wrists, and drew his arms tightly behind his back, and at the same time the widow's voice cried:

"Now's your chance, Mr. Coffin. Go for him, and punish him to your heart's content!"

Deadwood Dick's blood mounted to the boiling point in an instant. The widow intended to hold him literally, a prisoner, while the giant pounded him!

This would be sweet revenge for the scheming adventuress, whose hatred for him was confessed, but, even as Pete Coffin arose to his feet to take advantage of Dick's apparent helplessness, the latter threw himself suddenly forward—a movement so sudden and unsuspected, that he not only broke from the widow's clutch and threw her forcibly flat upon her fat face, but also, with a terrific rush, his head came in contact with the giant's somewhat capacious stomach, and totally upset him—doubled him up like a jack-knife, as it were, and both antagonists found the earth.

Dick was first upon his feet, and he bobbed up serenely, without a scratch.

When Mrs. W. Walsingham De Blandford managed to raise herself to an erect posture, she was covered with dirt, her face was skinned and bloody, her hair disheveled, and she looked as if she might have been on a "tear," with disastrous results.

Peter-the-great Coffin, did not make another attempt to arise, but lay rolling about on the ground, howling dismally.

The tremendous butt he had received had more completely knocked him out than a sledgehammer blow upon the cranium would have done.

Seeing that the fight was over, Deadwood Dick turned to De Campion, who still retained his perch upon the driver's seat of the coach.

"Mr. De Campion," he said, "while I think that were you not under the influence of that woman,"—pointing to the widow—"you might be a man of average good sense and intelligence, you must excuse me for saying that as long as you countenance her, or have anything to do with her, I will have nothing to do with you or your party. She is an adventuress, Simon pure, and her object, in hovering about you, is to possess what fortune you may have, to the exclusion of your rightful heirs. My advice is, that you cut loose from her, altogether, and open your eyes to the fact that her kind of spiritualism is a humbug, with which no one of sound sense will have any thing to do."

"This woman, Sarah Smithers, is not only a humbug and a schemer, but a criminal, and as such, she will yet be brought to justice, if my efforts are of any avail. I have the honor, sir, of bidding you good-day!"

And turning, the detective walked away.

Just as he was leaving the camp, Bessie intercepted him.

"Oh! Mr. Bristol, I fear there is going to be terrible trouble," she said.

"It may be!" Dick replied, quietly. "If there is, come to me, and I will defend you with my life."

She took his extended hand, trustingly.

"I know it, and I thank you," she replied.

"You are the only true friend I have ever had, since mamma died!"

She turned, then, and hurried to the camp, while Dick continued his walk along the lakeshore, in a thoughtful frame of mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE TOP OF MOUNT MAB.

DICK returned to his own camp, dispatched his hastily prepared evening meal, and then gave his weapons a good cleaning up.

"I may need them," he mused. "It won't do for me to be off my guard!"

While at work, he kept an eye on the De Campion camp, and, just at dusk, saw the giant leave the Basin, by the canyon route.

"That fellow means mischief, but if the widow manages to keep him under her influence, his vengeance will be chiefly directed toward me. If he does not attack me by surprise, I'll be ready for him. The next time, he'll not get off so easily, or I miss my guess."

His weapons cleaned, he took a long walk around the southerly coast of the lake, and by the time he got back to camp it was near midnight.

He did not feel sleepy, however, but, throwing himself upon his blanket, he kept his gaze riveted upon the summit of Mount Mab, and upon the white peaked camps of the De Campion "squat," which lay basking in the moonlight, without a sign of life visible about them.

Until two, A. M.

Then, Dick fancied he detected a stir.

Bringing his glass into requisition, he finally succeeded in discovering that Madam De Blandford was the party who was moving about the camp—more, that she was preparing for departure.

"I wonder where she is going? To meet that big ruffian, Pete Coffin, perhaps. By Jove! if that's the case, I must not miss that interview, for there may be some disclosure worth while for me to hear."

How to get to the mouth of the canyon, without being discovered by the madam, was not apparent, until suddenly, by good fortune, the moon went under a cloud, and threw the Basin into gloom.

Hastily seizing his rifle, Dick made for the canyon in double-quick time, and just succeeded in reaching it, when the moon once more made its appearance.

He was none too soon, for he had only time to conceal himself, when Mrs. De Blandford entered the canyon, and passed within a few feet of him.

She was attired in a plain walking-habit, and proceeded on up the canyon with the stride of one who had plenty of business on hand.

Dick soon followed, and the woman and her "shadow" traveled on through the rugged canyon for a mile or more; then the madam suddenly vanished.

When Dick reached the point where she had disappeared, he found that she had turned off into a deep, narrow, wooded ravine.

Away ahead, through the trees, he caught a glimmer of light, and concluded that it came from a camp-fire, so he stealthily picked his way through the timber.

In a few minutes he came to a point where he could safely advance no further, as the timber ceased at the edge of a green glade.

In the center of this glade burned a little camp-fire, and around it were gathered three persons—the madam, Pete Coffin, and another man.

The third party, who was roughly dressed, and nearly as desperate-looking as the giant, Dick concluded was Cojeta Jim.

The trio were seated upon boulders, and were engaged in earnest conversation, the nature of which Dick could only surmise.

The fact that there were no trees in the glade, and that the camp-fire lit it up in every part, made it impossible for the detective to venture out from the cover of the timber, without every chance of discovery, and the conversation carried on between the conspirators was in so low a tone that their voices were almost inaudible, so it was impossible to catch a word they uttered.

"I wonder what deviltry that woman is planning now? Her visit to these two ruffians, of course, had an evil purpose," Dick reflected. "Perhaps she's trying to hire them to put me out of the way, so she can have things all her own way."

Whatever was the object of the widow's visit, she remained in the ruffians' camp for over an hour, at the end of which time, and before departing, she paid the giant a considerable sum of money, judging by the size of the roll she gave him.

She then returned to the De Campion quarters, while Dick also sought his own.

Morning dawned rather ominously, for not only were the heavens threateningly overclouded, but there was a dense fog upon the lake and in the Basin, rendering it impossible for a person to see more than a few feet ahead.

Despite this fact, Dick had decided upon a mission. He intended to make an entire circuit of the lake, and then, if possible, ascend to the pinnacle of Mount Mab.

So, after a hasty breakfast, he mounted Electric, and set forth along the pebbly beach.

In some respects, the shore of the lake was peculiar. At almost regular intervals, a narrow belt of timber ran straight down the slope to the water's edge. The spaces, or natural pens between these belts of timber, was covered with fresh grass, and the timber itself was unincumbered with underbrush.

Dick's entire circuit of the lake resulted in but one discovery, and this was in the shape of a pretty canoe of birch bark, which was beached directly opposite the De Campions' camp.

There were footprints in the sand, by the canoe, proving that some human being had recently been there.

Examination disclosed that there was no paddle with which to propel the canoe, but, attached to its bow, was a small chain that ran out into the water, and there disappeared.

Raising this chain, and giving it a slight tug, Dick ascertained that it ran far out into the lake, in the direction of Mount Mab, a part of whose base was washed by the crystal waters.

"Ho! ho! Here's a go!" Dick chuckled. "I see, now, why there is no paddle to this canoe. It is a sort of ferry, and the propelling power is at the other end of that chain!"

He dropped the chain, mounted Electric, and rode on. He knew the chain must connect with some point in the mountain, and perhaps his tug at the linked line might cause the canoe to be drawn into the water.

If it were known that he had discovered the little craft, he might have more difficulty in finding the destination of the canoe; he rode on around the lake, passed back of the De Campion "squat," and sought his own quarters, where he tethered Electric out to graze.

The fog on the lake, and in the basin, had not diminished. It had increased, if anything.

Shouldering his rifle, after leaving his horse secure, the detective started out on his second cruise around the lake.

In due time, he came to the spot where the canoe was beached, and saw that it had not been disturbed. He then continued on until he came to the base of Mount Mab, and began a tortuous ascent, by a villainously steep path, which curved around and upward, toward the rear side of the table-land.

In his remarkable Western career, Dick had done some tough climbing, but he could remember no jaunt that so thoroughly fatigued him, as this trip to the top of Mount Mab.

When at last, he succeeded in reaching the level summit, he was fairly played out, and seating himself upon the rocky surface, he spent some minutes in getting breath.

Just how many, he could hardly have told, for it was only when he awoke, with a start, that he became aware of the fact that he had been asleep!

And, wonder of wonders, what was this his eyes beheld?

Truly, he could scarce believe the evidence of his senses, for there, sitting beside him, fanning his fevered brow with her sun-hat, was—Bessie Bly!

Her pretty face became wreathed with smiles as she noticed Dick's astonishment.

"You seem surprised, Mr. Bristol!" she remarked.

"Surprised! Why, I'd have quicker expected to see my great, great grandmother's shade."

"Indeed? I hope my presence is not an intrusion?"

"Certainly not! I am glad you came. But what in the world ever possessed you to come way up here, and alone, at that?"

"Oh! I had a curiosity to see what sort of a place it was, so I stole away before any one was awake. It took me an awful long time to get here, and you may judge my surprise when I found you here sound asleep!"

"Have you explored the place? I was so played out when I got here, that I sat down to rest, and that's the last I remember."

"I've not seen anything to explore," Bessie replied. "The top of the mountain is only a level surface, so far as I have observed."

The fog in the Basin below still prevailed, but on the top of Mount Mab there was none. Thus the mountain range panorama spread out before the vision of the twain, was one of peculiar grandeur and interest.

After chatting awhile, Dick and Bessie arose and sauntered over the mountain-top plateau.

There was little to be seen—seemingly nothing to discover. Level as a pane of glass, only a few seams cut and marred that high table-land, and yet Dick's observant eye caught something that many another person would have passed over unnoticed.

Almost exactly in the center of the plateau was a square block of rock, on a level with the general surface, but surrounded by a seam on its four sides, about half an inch wide by four in depth.

There was no ring in this block for the purpose of raising it, and it could not be pried out, as Dick found after several experiments, and at the cost of breaking one of his hunting-knives.

"There's more below this block," he declared to Bessie. "There is, if I am not greatly mistaken, a passageway into the bowels of this mountain, that extends downward to the level of the lake, and here beneath us will be found the secret mine of the Silent Tongues, of whom the giant spoke, is my guess."

"Do you really think so?"

"I do. The impression seems strong that there is a secret mine hereabouts—so at least Pete Coffin and his partner, Coyote Jim, declare, and therefore there must be some foundation for their supposition, and the supposition almost made a certainty by the appearance of the Old Man upon this mountain-top."

"You are a singular person," Bessie declared. "You seem to see and know things by some divination."

Dick smiled, but made no answer.

They wandered about the mountain-top for awhile, and then seated themselves at the brink overlooking the Basin below.

The sun was now nearing the meridian, and below the fog began gradually to disappear.

"I have been wondering a great deal, over a queer coincidence!" Bessie remarked, as they sat and gazing downward at the De Campion encampment, which was gradually coming into view, through the lifting mist.

"To what coincidence do you refer, may I ask?"

"To our meeting. Do you remember my saying that I would like to see Deadwood Dick?"

"I believe you did mention something of the sort."

"And you are really Deadwood Dick?"

"I am Deadwood Dick, junior. I assumed the title of Deadwood Dick, under the peculiar circumstances of coming across the *original's* grave, while seeking a burial spot for my murdered mother. There, I swore to avenge mother's death, and I knew no rest until I made good my oath. I was but a youth, then; now, I am a man—an honest one, I hope. Now that you have found this notorious Deadwood Dick, what do you think of him?"

"You are so near the ideal of what I supposed you would be, from what I have read of

you, that I am not surprised, except at the coincidence of meeting you."

"Why, you don't half appreciate me!" Dick protested. "You haven't seen me kill a couple of men for breakfast, and so forth, yet."

"I saw you whip one man so thoroughly that I've no doubt concerning your capabilities!"

There was a brief silence, broken, finally, by the inquiry:

"Miss Bly, has Gerald De Campion made an attempt to prejudice you against me?"

"Why do you ask that, Mr. Bristol?"

"Out of curiosity. Perhaps, to make matters plainer, I might ask, is he anything to you, or are you anything to him? If you can answer I can more readily explain my question, presumptive as it may seem to you."

"I don't know how to answer it," was Bessie's response, her face coloring a trifle. "Mr. De Campion I have always regarded as a friend. Of his own feelings it is not for me to say, of course."

"Nor is it essential that you should!" exclaimed a sternly sarcastic voice.

They turned, and standing near they beheld dark-faced Gerald De Campion!

"I could have hurled you both over the precipice," he said, bitterly, "but preferred, rather, to enjoy your discomfiture."

CHAPTER IX.

THE BATTLE IN THE AIR.

It was then and there, on the top of Mount Mab, that Gerald De Campion more than ever deserved to be called Dark Gerald, for his face was grown fairly livid with the passion that controlled him.

As for Dick and Bessie, both were startled and angered, and the detective was upon his feet in an instant, assisting the girl to arise also.

"Why, is that you, Mr. De Campion?" Dick said. "You quite startled me."

"I did, eh? Am I such a startling looking individual as all that amounts to?"

"Why, certainly not. But your coming was so unexpected."

"It wasn't to me," Gerald retorted. "I believe you promised to let me know when you paid this place a visit; but, of course you found better company. Unfortunately, I am neither a flirt nor a male coquette!"

Deadwood Dick flushed indignantly.

"De Campion, you do me an injustice," he said. "I came here early—earlier than you were astir, I believed. More than that, I had my doubts if you would care to accompany me, since you have taken pains to avoid meeting me, after asking me a favor. As for Miss Bly, she came here of her own accord, and without my previous knowledge. There was no pre-arranged meeting, as you seem to suppose, and even if there was, I don't know that it is any of your business!"

Gerald smiled contemptuously.

"You need not put yourself to the trouble of framing any excuses!" he said. "You are a fresh duck, anyhow, and if my wife prefers your society to my own, you can have it. But you will have to earn it first!"

"Your wife?" ejaculated Dick. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you have grossly insulted me by courting the favor of my wife—for such she is!" pointing to Bessie. "To an English gentleman his honor is very dear, and you have insulted mine to that extent that I am here to seek redress!"

Dick turned to Bessie, who had grown pale with indignation.

"Miss Bly, is it true that you are Gerald De Campion's wife?" he demanded.

"No! no! it is not!" Bessie hastily replied.

"I am nothing to Gerald De Campion more than an acquaintance, and when he says that I am his wife, he states what is meanly false."

"I believe you!" Dick replied. Then turning to the accuser, he added: "Gerald De Campion, I am astonished at you."

"Oh, are you?" was the insolent reply.

"Well, that girl is mine no matter whether she will or whether she won't, and if she don't at once come with me, I'll kill you both!"

"I won't go with you!" cried Bessie, indignantly. "If I ever thought well of you before, I despise you now, Gerald De Campion! Mr. Bristol is a gentleman and man of honor, and I infinitely prefer his friendship to yours!"

"Indeed? As I've often heard said, no amount of good training will make an intelligent person out of a country—"

"Stop!" cried Dick, advancing a step.

"Dare to insult this lady in my presence, and I will break every bone in your body, you British boor!"

This seemed to be a rash threat, the same as in the case of the giant, for De Campion was a tall man of athletic build, and the chances were that he possessed more science than the big ruffian, Pete Coffin, had displayed.

It made no difference to Deadwood Dick, however. His blood was up, and when that was the case, he would as soon have attacked a Hercules as a sneak thief.

The effect of his threat upon De Campion was electrical. In coming to the top of Mount Mab, he had worn a linen duster, buttoned to the throat. This he immediately unbuttoned and cast aside, and it was then seen that, attached to a belt about his waist, were two gleaming short swords.

"I will not fight you with knuckles!" he said, "but with the weapons British gentlemen use."

"Oh! Mr. Bristol, do not accept his challenge!" Bessie cried, clinging to Dick's arm. "He is an expert swordsman, and will kill you!"

"That's what I intend to do!" Gerald declared, grimly. "I want to have the honor of presenting you with his head, in lieu of his heart, when I have decapitated him, my dear."

Dick gently released himself of Bessie's hold upon his arm.

"Don't fear for me," he said, quietly. "This fellow has so thoroughly shown himself the villain, that I cannot refuse to meet him. I am not afraid of him, be he an expert or not!"

He then faced De Campion.

"One of your stickers, please!" he demanded.

"We might as well fight it out now, as any time, if fight it is to be."

"If you are afraid to fight, and will apologize, perhaps I'll let you off this time!" dark Gerald said, loftily.

"Afraid? Afraid to fight *what*, pray? Why, you thick-headed booby, I don't know what fear is! You brought about this unpleasantness purely through your idiotic jealousy, and now, if you're not man enough to stand by your proposition, why, I am the one to demand apology!"

"You'll get none from me!" De Campion replied, as he proceeded to detach the swords from his belt. "I'll fight you, and fight you to the death, at that. There shall be no mercy, now, in this engagement!"

"None!" reiterated the dauntless Dick. "The best man wins, and may the Great Swordsman, who levels all, forgive us both."

Dick was handed one of the weapons. It was a fine blade, as keen-edged as a razor, but was not as long, by an inch, as that of De Campion—as the challenger well knew.

As the two grasped their weapons, and glared at each other, there was a piercing scream, and Bessie sunk to the ground in a swoon, but there was no time to pay any attention to her now, for Dick was put "on guard" at once.

"Ready?" De Campion demanded.

"Ready!" Dick replied.

"What disposition do you want made of your remains, sir?" demanded the Briton, with a sneer on his hard face.

"Oh! I'm not particular. You might as well leave 'em up here, where it's cool. In case the victim should be *you*, what kind of flowers do you want planted on your grave—a mullein stalk or skunk cabbage?"

"Now for you, you insolent cur!" cried De Campion, his dark face pale with passion.

The blades crossed, and the combat to the death was begun.

Clash! clash! clash!

Parry, feint, thrust!

Up-stroke, down-stroke, lunge!

Each combatant knew that his life depended on three things—his science, his strength, his endurance.

In the beginning the odds, apparently, were with the Englishman, for he was in the prime of life, strong-limbed, and in every way the physical equal of the Wild West detective, with the great advantage that he had been educated in the art of swordsmanship, while Deadwood Dick had not—was a novice with the weapon.

De Campion at once assumed the offensive, but Dick managed, with marvelous agility, to parry his blows, so it soon became a matter of endurance, rather than of science.

One thing Dick felt certain of from the start: it was De Campion's purpose to drive him over the precipice rather than kill him with the sword. Therefore the young American used every precaution to keep as far away from the brink as possible.

Around and around the level surface of the mountain-top the two men moved, the ring of

their steel blades keeping time like the batons of an infernal orchestra.

De Campion's attack seemed to increase in vigor as the minutes passed, and finally he succeeded in driving Dick almost to the verge of the precipice overlooking the lake. Then he made a desperate lunge that forced his antagonist over the brink!

There was a horrified cry from Dick's lips, and that was all, as he disappeared from view.

De Campion did not look over the brink to see what had become of his victim, but at once hurriedly left the mountain-top, by the way he had come, evidently remorse-stricken for his mad act.

As for Bessie Bly, she was left in the swoon where she had fallen.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE HEART OF MOUNT MAB.

NOT doubting that he had hurled the intrepid Deadwood Dick to his death, and thus relieved himself of a supposed rival, Gerald De Campion clambered down a rough mountain path, and in due time reached his father's camp, in Beelzebub's Basin.

In answer to his inquiries as to whether anything had recently been seen of Deadwood Dick, he was informed in the negative, and concluded no notice had been taken by those below, of the duel on the mountain top; so, after awhile, when he thought he would not be attracting much attention he took a trip along the face of the mountain, to see if he could find anything of the detective's remains.

As mentioned, in a preceding chapter, the base of the mountain on its southern extremity was lapped by the waters of the lake, and this impediment to fast progress around the lake, had to be overcome by clambering over a ledge that buttressed out, some ten or fifteen feet above the lake.

In falling from the mountain top, the young Englishman calculated that Dick must have struck upon this ledge, but a careful examination of the spot, failed to reveal any trace of blood, or other evidence of the detective's fate.

Nor could anybody be found floating in the lake.

"It's mighty queer what became of him!" Gerald mused, as he made his way back to camp. "It can't be possible that he saved himself from death, for I see no shrubs on the rock, above, that would particularly have retarded his fall!"

As nothing was found to aid in clearing up the mystery, Gerald made his way back to camp, in anything but an enviable frame of mind.

If Deadwood Dick was dead, then he, Gerald De Campion, was a murderer; but if his victim had, by some marvelous chance, escaped death, then he, Gerald De Campion, had incurred the eternal hatred of a man whose enmity no one could well wish to have, for, if still alive the young American would surely seek a speedy revenge upon the Briton—at least, so said Gerald, to himself.

And Deadwood Dick, wonderful to relate, was not dead!

When he was forced over the brink and uttered the shriek of horror, he knew that no earthly power could save him from a horrible death.

Down! down! he went; his senses suddenly left him; then all became blank.

When he awoke to consciousness, it was with a feeling of awe and wonderment, for his fall from the top of Mount Mab came back to him, like a flash, and he wondered whether he was really dead or alive.

If dead, his decease had been painless.

He was now surrounded by a pall of utter blackness, and his eyes were powerless, to penetrate the Stygian gloom.

For several seconds he lay motionless, almost afraid to stir, lest he should break the mysterious spell that surrounded him.

Then, as he heard no sound, he began to have an anxiety to know whether he was, or was not a living creature. If not, it was plain that he had been swallowed up in a pit of eternal darkness.

He arose to a sitting posture, and by groping about, found that he had been lying upon a sort of bench.

But where? What sort of a prison or tomb was this he was occupying, where there was no trace of light, and but very little air to breathe?

He sat still, in hopes that his eyes would gradually become accustomed to the gloom, and enable him to partly make out his surroundings, but in this he was doomed to disappointment.

A search of his pockets, revealed the fact that

he had been relieved of everything, even to his match-box, and handkerchief!

"Well, this don't exactly strike me as the square deal," he mused. "It's a wonder my captors, whoever they maybe, didn't take my clothing, too."

As there was nothing to be gained by sitting still, he arose, and began a groping search. The greatest of precaution had to be observed; a single incautious step might precipitate him into some lurking death-trap, that yawned before him.

He finally reached a rocky wall, and felt his way along this, both with hand and foot.

Instead of being a dungeon, as he had at first anticipated, he proved to be in a rugged seam or fissure, with a downward descent, and growing narrower as it proceeded, until it was scarcely wide enough for him to squeeze through comfortably.

Dick was somewhat encouraged, however, by the hope that the passageway would lead to some point where there would at least be more light on the subject, and so he kept on.

The progress was slow, however, and perhaps half an hour was absorbed, before he reached a place where there was more light.

And there, a discovery, indeed awaited him.

The fissure he had been traveling through, abruptly debouched upon a ledge, or rocky gallery, which ran around a great rock-roofed circular space, similar to the auditorium of a theater!

This singular corridor was near the dome, and looked off down into a pit to the depth of maybe a hundred and fifty feet.

This auditorium was rectangular in shape, and there were ledge galleries, at intervals of every ten or twelve feet, until the bottom of the pit was reached.

Lights were burning, here and there, and pigmy-like figures were seen hurrying about, some appearing to be working with pick and shovel, while others were carrying something in pails.

The distance from the top gallery to the bottom, most likely it was, that gave the diminutive appearance to the figures below.

"By Jove!" Dick ejaculated as he lay flat upon the ledge, and gazed at the picture below, "I really believe I'm in the secret mine of the Silent Tongues, tho' I may be mistaken, and it may be Hades I'm looking down into. I hardly think so, however, for I don't smell sulphur!"

He watched the scene below, with intense interest, and also noted that rugged and dangerous pathways, hewn out of the rock, ran down from one gallery, to another.

The walls of this marvelous amphitheater, the bottom of which covered an area of nearly an acre, were blackened and rugged, while the dome was covered with stalactites of grotesque shape.

At some immeasurable period, this mountain with its wonderful subterranean chamber had been either a volcano, or a boiling geyser caldron—most likely the former.

"This must be in the heart of Mount Mab," the watcher mused, "and it is here that the Old Man and his satellites hold out. I don't see the old fellow down below, however."

Just then his sharp ears caught the sound of a footstep, and looking partly over his shoulder, he beheld, standing within a few paces of him, no less a personage than the Old Man!

He was tall and bony, and evidently possessed of unusual strength.

As for his general appearance, it was the same as when Dick had first seen him on the mountain-top, with the aid of his glass, except that the hair and beard were grayer, and the face more furrowed with wrinkles. The eyes, however, were bright and piercing in their gaze, and, as a whole, the countenance of the strange personage wore a kindly expression.

He was regarding the detective curiously, as he leaned upon his staff.

"Well, young man, what brings you here, to the land of the Silent Tongues?" he demanded, in a deep, strong voice.

"That's just what I'd like to have answered!" Dick replied. "From all I know, I must have fallen here. I tumbled off the mountain-top, and the next thing I knew when I awoke to consciousness, I found myself in a dark cavern, from whence I groped my way here. I've just been deliberating whether I have landed in Heaven, or t'other place."

A faint smile lurked about the Old Man's mustache-shaded mouth.

"You'll have to take a bath in the River Styx, before you reach the t'other place, as you term it," he said. "This is the land of the Silent Tongues, who have passed through all the de-

grees, and who enters here, ne'er returns again to the world from whence he came."

"The blazes, you say! And, who are you?"

"I am The Old Man—the Supreme Ruler of the Silent Tongues."

"Humph! And, I suppose, according to what you have said, I am not likely to get out of this place, very soon."

"Probably not. What brought you here?"

"To this cavern?"

"No, to Beelzebub's Basin."

"Oh! I just drifted there by chance, incidental to my travels!"

"Did you not come here in hopes of finding the secret mine of the Silent Tongues?"

"I did not. I knew nothing, at the time of my entrance into Beelzebub's Basin, of the existence of such a mine."

"You are not connected with the other party in the Basin, I take it."

"No, I am not! No English man in mine, if you please."

"They endeavored to secure your services as guide to help them get out of the mountains, did they not?"

"Yes."

"You refused them?"

"I did, decidedly."

"For what reason?"

"Oh! I don't know that I care to say just what reason. It was so effective however that they did not secure my services."

The Old Man did not seem to relish this answer. He remained silent, staring down into the pit before him, until finally, Deadwood Dick broke the silence!

"Well, Mr. Old Man, if you haven't any objections to telling me, I'd like to know how I came in the place where I found myself, when I came to my senses."

"You were rescued," was the reply. "About twenty feet below the top of the rock, is a fissure, penetrating the heart of the mountain. From this fissure grow a couple of saplings, extending from the rock about fourteen feet, and standing some five feet apart. Upon this support is an almost invisible netting, made of dried horse-gut. On pleasant days, it has been my pleasure to crawl out upon this aerial hammock, and go to sleep. In falling from the mountain-top, you landed upon this net, and there I found you, and dragged you into the cavern."

"I see. Well, I'm much obliged, for I reckon there'd be hardly a grease-spot left of me, if I had fallen clear to the bottom."

"Indeed, there would not."

"I suppose you are not aware that I fought a duel on the mountain-top?"

"On the contrary, I am aware of it, for, unknown to you, I was an eye-witness."

"Ah! What became of my adversary, after I tumbled off the cliff?"

"He descended the mountain-side, and returned to his camp, I suppose."

"And the young lady?"

"She was lying where she fainted, the last I saw of her."

At this juncture, the dwarf, whom Dick had seen in company with the Old Man on the mountain, approached, accompanied by six stalwart, heavily bewhiskered, roughly-clad men.

"Ah! Hager, is that you?" the Old Man said, addressing the dwarf. "What brings you here?"

"The Silent Tongues are uneasy," was the reply, "and want to know why the stranger is here."

"The Silent Tongues need have no fear," the Old Man replied, "for the stranger is a prisoner, and must either join the Silent Tongues, or be given up to them for disposition as they shall determine."

Deadwood Dick assumed the defensive at once, at this.

"I don't know about that, Old Gent. I am not quite ready to join any band for any purpose. As long as I didn't come to this den of yours of my own accord, I allow it's only fair for you to let me depart."

"I cannot do it, young man. You now know too much!" the Old Man replied, without acerbity of manner, however. "We have our secret to keep, and our laws and rules, which must be carried out, in order to protect our safety and our possessions."

"The stranger must die!" Hager declared, glaring at Dick wickedly. "The Silent Tongues will not tolerate an addition to their number."

"They will do just as I say about it!" the Old Man returned decisively. "This man is my prisoner, and I am master here. Take him to the chain, and there await my coming." And turning to Dick, he added:

"You are a prisoner, sir, until I decide what

disposal is to be made of you. Go peaceably with my lieutenant, and you will not be harmed for the present. I must have time to deliberate before I decide what is to be your fate."

Unarmed as he was, and incapacitated for resistance, Dick had no choice, and so followed the dwarf, who led the way to the pit below, Hager muttering as they went. Evidently the mountain gnome was in an ugly mood.

CHAPTER XI.

A SINGULAR BARGAIN.

From the upper corridor Dick was conducted to the bottom of the pit, where more of the Silent Tongues were busily engaged with pick, shovel and drill, in the work of mining.

The bottom of the pit was a species of brittle rock that was easily worked.

A chain was soon padlocked around Deadwood Dick's waist, and to this another chain was attached, fastened to a ring in the side of the pit. This done, Dick was left to himself.

Seating himself upon a rock, he watched matters as they were going on around, and observed that none of the men spoke to each other, except that the dwarf occasionally gave orders about the work.

It was several hours before the prisoner was approached by the Old Man, who came down from one of the upper corridors.

He seated himself near the detective, and taking a pipe from his pocket, filled it, and when he had taken a couple of meditative whiffs, he spoke:

"Well, prisoner, what is your name?"

"Richard Bristol, sometimes called Deadwood Dick," was the prompt response.

"What is your business?"

"Oh, a little of everything, and not much of anything. I have devoted a considerable portion of my life to detective work, however."

"Are you married?"

"I am not."

"You are poor, I presume."

"Oh! no, not so very," Dick returned. "There are a number of Western towns to which I can go and draw comfortable sums of money. I am not what you would call rich, but I've got enough laid by for a rainy day, so that I needn't resort to hard labor unless I choose to."

"You are more fortunate than I thought. Supposing an opportunity were offered you to marry a pretty girl, who also possessed a fortune in her own right—what would you say to that?"

"I reckon you'd have to count me out on that score," Dick demurred. "I'm not matrimonially inclined at present."

"Perhaps not; but then of course you'd marry to save your life."

"I don't know about that. When you come to know me better, Mr. King of this Cavern, you'll find that I won't drive any better, than a contrary hog, nor half so well in fact."

The Old Man shrugged his shoulders.

"There is only one way I can save your life," he declared.

"And that is—"

"By your marrying my daughter; then I shall have a right to protect you."

"Your daughter?"

"Just so. For your enlightenment I will make a few brief explanations."

"This band of Silent Tongues are not, as you may suppose, of recent organization. Many years ago, when this range of mountains was even more of a howling wilderness than to-day, a French Canadian—a fur-trader, I believe—discovered this place, and the wonderful golden treasure it contained. Instead of heralding his discovery to the world, this wily rover kept it a secret, until he returned to Canada East. There he organized a band of twenty men, and brought them here to work the mine; but they were sworn to secrecy before they left Canada, and did not even know what they were to be set at work at until they reached this chamber."

"Well, it is told that the yield of gold was something fabulous, but, as old Pierre Hager gave his men only small wages, while he was individually amassing great wealth, they grew restless, and finally mutinous, and ten of their number formed a conspiracy to kill old Hager. He got wind of what was threatened, and enlisting his son Peepo, and two others whom he could implicitly trust, into his confidence, he turned the tables upon the would-be murderers."

"While they slept they were made prisoners, and three of those who refused to swear eternal allegiance to Pierre Hager, and forever keep a silent tongue in their heads, were thrown into

the lake that very night. Those who took the iron-clad oath, and forever forbade themselves the privilege of speaking, except with their ruler's permission, were spared, and given a percentage profit of the mine's production, which was, of course, better than their former wages."

"The result was that harmony once more existed among the band, and the Silent Tongues were increased to the limited number of twenty, their present force, aside from Peepo, the dwarf and myself. Of the original number of Silent Tongues, but eight are now living, and they are quite rich. As soon as one of the number dies, another man is hunted up and pressed into the service. At present, the men are so well satisfied with matters that they have no desire to leave the mine, and are so bitterly opposed to an addition to their number that, under the lead of Hager—who is as vicious in temper as he is deformed in body and brutal in heart—they will take quick vengeance on any intruder."

"Several years ago I saved old Hager's life, up in the mountains, and he showed me his gratitude by bringing me here. When he got me here he made me virtually a prisoner, but did not enforce the ban of silence or any particular labor upon me. Not long afterward he died, and made me ruler in his stead, with Peepo for lieutenant."

"Now I find that your presence here is a source of bitter resentment among the Silent Tongues. I have had an argument with a couple of them who have been taking counsel with Hager, and they insist that they will have your life, unless you comply with two requirements."

"Well, what are these requirements?"

"Their demands are this: You must, first of all, make a deficiency in their number—that is, you must meet and defeat in a fair battle one whom they shall elect."

"Commit murder, eh?"

"No, not necessarily that. The man to be pitted against you will not be an easy victim."

"Which man is he?"

"Peepo, of course. He is possessed of the idea that you are here in Beelzebub's Basin to destroy the Silent Tongues, and he has chosen this method to wreak his vengeance."

"Why, he is but a pigmy in size."

"Make no mistake about him. He is a diabolical imp, skilled in the use of weapons. He is greatly feared by all the men, who would rejoice, I know, to be well rid of him."

"The second consideration is that I marry your daughter, I suppose, as you already have suggested?"

"Yes; that is a stipulation which I have added to Hager's demands."

"Where is she? I have not seen her yet."

"She is not here at present, but can be brought on short notice. You are not to see her face until you have married her. Then, if you do not want to live with her you can leave here, seek another part of the country, and get a divorce. The marriage, you see, frees you from all restraint, and that is why my daughter assents to the act."

"And you countenance this sort of thing?" Deadwood Dick exclaimed, his astonishment knowing no bounds.

"I do, and for this reason: No tragedy has taken place here since I came into rule, and I would avert one so far as lies in my power. I like you, and would not have you made the victim of a sacrifice which I know I should be powerless to prevent."

"Do the men understand the conditions you have named to me?"

"Perfectly. It is, as I have said, my own stipulation to their decision that you shall, in any event, fight this duel with Hager."

"And they will permit me to leave here, if I wish, after I have complied with these terms?"

"Yes. You will be sworn to divulge the secret of this place to no one, and then, as my son-in-law, you will be at liberty to come and go whenever you please."

"And what if I refuse to accept these terms?"

"Then, your fate be on your own head."

Deadwood Dick made no answer immediately, but sat meditatively staring at the rocky floor of the cavern.

What should he say?

More, what should he do?

What could he do?

For full ten minutes he remained silent—then the Old Man spoke up:

"Well, my friend, I hope you have arrived at a sensible conclusion."

"I've been considering it all, but I can't say I've much choice in the matter. One alternative is about as bad as the other, if I'm any judge."

"Oh, no. On one hand, you have life, liberty and years of usefulness before you; on the other hand, what?—that which no man shall know until he has passed through the dark valley."

"Well, answer me two questions, and I will give you my decision."

"Very well. What are they?"

"The first is, in marrying me, will your daughter do so of her own free will?"

"Yes. She will gladly comply with my wishes."

"The second question is, are you the Colonel Bly, who was formerly the master of a place called Live Oaks, in the State of Virginia?"

The detective's gaze was fixed searchingly upon the Old Man's face, but he was both surprised and disappointed to note no expression of astonishment or curiosity.

"To your question," was the quiet reply, "I can only say that I am the Old Man. Who or what else I am, or ever was, matters not. My past is as a sealed book, with uncut pages."

"Will I know my wife's name when I marry her?"

"When you have been pronounced man and wife, yes."

"Very well. You can tell your close-mouthed satellites that I will accept of their conditions."

The Old Man bowed, and rising, stalked away. In half an hour he returned.

"The Silent Tongues are pleased," he announced, "and I have given them brief permission to speak with you!"

He placed a silver whistle to his lips and blew a shrill call.

Instantly the men all quit work and assembled near the spot where Dick was chained, both he and the Old Man having risen.

The dwarf was not with the miners, but they were represented by an intelligent-looking man of the party, whose name Dick afterward learned was Tom Trull.

"Stranger!" this individual said, pausing a few feet in advance of his command, "our chief, the Old Man, whom we both respect and obey, tells us you have accepted our conditions, by which you may have a chance to retain your life."

"He has told you correctly," Dick replied. "I have concluded to make the best of a bad job. Where's the chap I am to murder?"

The spokesman of the Silent Tongues flushed a trifle.

"We are not so red-handed as you seem to infer!" he responded. "We are simply giving you a chance to fight for your life, and if you win, you need have nothing to regret, for the man we shall pit against you is eager for the fray, and I may say he will kill you if he can."

"All right. Trot him out!"

"Peepo! Peepo!" cried Trull.

In answer to the call, the dwarf emerged from behind a rock near at hand, and strutted forward.

"That's your adversary," addressing Dick.

"Humph! he's a daisy!" the detective said.

"New breed of animals, ain't he?"

"You're likely to find him a thoroughbred," was Trull's significant reply.

"Well, turn me loose, and I'll soon find out his pedigree!" was the retort.

"The time of the contest rests with the Old Man," Trull replied.

"I have selected the hour of ten o'clock tomorrow night for the battle!" the Old Man decided, addressing Dick. "If you win, you will immediately afterward be married to my daughter."

"By whom? Where's your preacher?" queried Dick.

"There's one within half a day's ride!" the Old Man assured.

"All right! What kind of weapons are we to fight with?"

"You and Peepo will toss for choice. Peepo prefers the bow and arrow. Whichever wins the choice, the distance will be the same—fifty paces. Until the hour for the battle, Mr. Bristol, you will be locked up in a comfortable dungeon, which was specially prepared for visitors, and have the best our larder affords."

Dick was now released of his chain and taken to a little cell which had been chipped into the left side of the great amphitheater, and was protected by a door of strong ironwood bars.

Here he was locked in and given a lantern, a pipe, tobacco, and a stone bowl of water to keep him company.

Through the gratings of his little dungeon door, he could command a view of the better part of the main cavern, so that he was by no means isolated.

The furnishings of his temporary prison, too, were by no means as primitive as they might

have been. There was a mattress and pillow, stuffed with leaves, a couple of blankets, a three-legged stool, and a shelf hewn out of the rock to answer the place of a table.

CHAPTER XII.

REMORSE.

LET us now return to the camp of the De Campions.

The fog hung thickly and persistently over lake and pocket, until mid-afternoon, ere it cleared entirely away.

And it was mid-afternoon, too, before Bessie Bly made her reappearance in camp.

She was weak and pale, and there were indications about her eyes that she had been weeping.

Gerald De Campion, dark and more gloomy than ever, lay upon a blanket smoking his meerschaum, as she passed on her way to her tent.

"Murderer!" she hissed, as she swept by.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, suddenly sitting up, his eyes flaming redly.

She paused and gazed sternly at him a moment, in the mean time taking a ribbon from around her neck, forming it into a slipping noose, and holding it up before his gaze; then she went on, and disappeared in the tent occupied by herself and Editha.

Gerald De Campion bit his lip, as he laid aside his pipe, and resumed a half-reclining position.

"I deserved to be shot!" he said. "Not only have I lost whatever chance I might have had of winning her, but I have made myself a criminal, and a possible victim. Curse me for an idiot, that I should let jealousy, or admiration for any woman, get the better of my judgment. I wish, heartily, that I had never seen Dick Bristol. He treated me honorably, and, how did I treat him? Gods! I don't believe I'll ever know a minute's rest again. And it will serve me right if I don't!"

His mental agony, betrayed by the emotional working of his features, was for a time pitiable to behold.

"Well, I suppose it's done, and can't be undone," he finally muttered, "though it's a mystery to me what became of the fellow's body. As for my future, what? There is nothing left for me to do but wait. I am not a coward and I will not run. If the scaffold is my throne, I will face it without a struggle. I killed a man so much more a man, in a true sense than I ever could be, that I cannot give my own welfare a thought. My poor brother! May he never come to this!"

From that time, until the hour of his death, Gerald De Campion was never more like himself, and yet, unlike himself. He was a human being dying a living death.

During the remainder of the day, matters were quiet about the camp. Major De Campion did not emerge from his tent. The widow, who was very punctual in her visits to him, said that he was indisposed.

Gerald's brother had gone off for a ramble; Raphael De Percy Todd devoted himself assiduously to studying a cheap volume of Shakespeare; Barnabas Bugstein did nothing, except lounge about, and occasionally hold a consultation with the widow, whenever she would emerge from the major's tent.

Moodily, but with gleaming eyes, Gerald De Campion managed to watch this precious pair during their consultations, without appearing to do so.

"There's mischief brewing," he decided. "That Jew did not join us without a purpose. He and the adventuress are hand-in-hand in some scheme, and the old gent is the game, I am sure. Well—"

He did not finish the sentence, but his pearl-like teeth grated together in a way not pleasant to hear.

Toward sunset, Madam De Blandford emerged from the major's tent for perhaps the twentieth time that afternoon. She adjusted her gold-rimmed glasses, flashed a glance in the direction of the canyon mouth, and then glided over toward Gerald.

"Your father is quite ill!" she said.

"Is that so?" yawned Gerald. "What appears to be the matter with the old gent?"

"Indeed, I do not know. He complains of terrible pains through the body, and a suffocating feeling in the region of the heart. I am really alarmed."

"Yes, I should think you would be!" Gerald answered, dryly. "The old man has probably got an attack of wind colic. You're enough to

give any one that. Please tender him my regrets, and say that I will see him, as soon as I have finished my pipe."

"Gerald De Campion!" cried the widow, "you are an irreverent wretch. You haven't a spark of human feeling in your heart!"

"Perhaps not. The spirits have had considerable to do with ossifying that useful member."

Madam turned away, fairly furious, and went and held a consultation with Barnabas Bugstein.

Gerald smiled, vaguely.

"She would like to knife me, if she dared," he said, to himself. "I'm an eyesore to her. She dares not proceed, open-handed, with her schemes, while I am around. Gods! If Noel were only like me, but without the curse now resting upon my soul. No! no! What am I talking about? Leave the light-hearted, guileless boy alone! He will win friends, where dark Gerald will win enemies. God bless my angel mother, whom I never saw, to remember, but she must have borne me on a dark day!"

Later, when his perturbed nature was more composed, Gerald paid a visit to his father.

The major was lying upon his improvised bed of dry leaves and grass, and with a blanket thrown over it.

Night had fallen, and a lantern suspended from the roof-pole of the tent, shed enough light upon the sick man's features, to enable Gerald to see that pallor had succeeded the usual florid color of his complexion.

"Why, father, what appears to be the matter with you?" Gerald accosted, kneeling beside the primitive bed.

"Indeed, I don't know," the old man responded. "I am feeling very badly. I fear I am nearing my end."

"Well, I hope not. Had you heeded me, you would never have taken this foolish trip. If you die, however, I will see that you are taken home."

"And you will look after Noel, Gerald?"

"Noel will never want for a penny while I have one," was the reply.

"Gerald, you have not acted like a son by me, of late."

"Because I have been outlawed from your affections. You have been insane, and I could only look upon you with pity."

"You hate Mrs. De Blandford."

"I do not know such a person. I simply loathe the creature, who, to get your fortune, has made an idiot of you!"

"Gerald! You are cruel!"

"Father, I am just. I don't want a penny of what you are worth. I want Noel to have it. But, I suppose the adventuress will get it. If so, it shall not do her any good. State's Prison awaits her, and if she does not get there, she will go to a worse place. While she is insidiously instilling the delusion of spiritualism into your mind, she is working a worse poison into your system!"

"Sir! What do you mean?" and the major with an effort raised himself upon his elbow.

"I mean that if you allow that woman around you, you will not live forty-eight hours. That's all need be said. When you exclude her, for once and for all time, others will come to your rescue if it be not too late. Good-by!"

And Gerald turned to go.

"Gerald! Gerald! my boy! my boy!" called the major. "Please do not go away angry. I will satisfy you. No will has been made, prior to my last one, which was made in Washington."

"When?"

"Before I met Mrs. De Blandford."

"Thank God! If you are fool enough to make another one, I'll throttle you as you are dying," Gerald declared, and left the tent.

He was consumed with commingled anger, dread, vengeance.

He was wild! He wanted air!

He paced to and fro along the pebbly beach—to and fro, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, seemingly a moving automaton, conscious of nothing.

At last, utterly exhausted, he sunk upon the sand, and in the depth of remorse which now ruled his soul, he moaned like one in utter agony.

Bewildered, he finally aroused and sat up.

A touch had brought him back to reason.

He could see, he could hear, but could not speak.

Kneeling beside him, Bessie Bly was gently wiping the sand from his fevered brow.

"Gerald! poor Gerald!" she said, gently.

"Do not take it so hard. I know it was an act of passion, and I forgive you. Rouse, Gerald, for you are needed. Your father is dying. You

must save him—do you hear, you must save him! Good-by, Gerald!"

He felt a pressure of her lips upon the forehead, and it sent the blood once more rioting through his veins.

With a gasp and a mighty effort, he managed to get upon his feet.

The moonlight was still bright.

He saw a rapidly retreating figure.

"Bessie! Bessie!" he called.

But the only answer was the waters as they lapped the beach.

Then he essayed to overtake the figure, but to no use. He stumbled, fell—then all became blank.

Poor Gerald!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OLD MAN'S MERCY.

WHEN Gerald De Campion awoke, it was in the tent occupied by him and his brother. Noel was kneeling beside him, gently bathing his head.

Gerald's strength had returned, and he sat up and glared around him, inquiringly.

"What time is it?" he demanded.

"It is ten o'clock, in the morning," Noel replied. "You have been unconscious a long time."

"Yes, I suppose so. It was night, the last I remember. How is father?"

"He is no better."

"Is the widow still waiting upon him?"

"Yes."

"Where is Bessie?"

"In her tent, I suppose. I have been very anxious for you to wake up, Gerald, for I have something to tell you."

"Well, what is it?"

"There's a plot to kidnap Bessie!"

"How do you know?"

"Well, last night, before I found you, I was over at the mottle, where Deadwood Dick has been camping, but he was not there. While I was there, I heard voices, and creeping near to where they came from, I saw Mrs. De Blandford talking to the giant, Pete Coffin."

"Ah! It is as I expected! What was said?"

"I don't recall the exact words, but the plot is that Coffin and his pal, Cojeta Jim, are to come here, to-night, and kidnap Bessie, and carry her off into the mountains. Then, Cojeta is to come to our father, and make terms for returning her."

"I see! I see!" Gerald exclaimed. "Did you hear what the terms were?"

"Yes. Cojeta is to visit father and demand a ransom of ten thousand dollars, for Bessie's release, and also demand that father sign over all his property and personal effects, to the widow. The penalty for refusing to do this, will be that the wolves will be turned loose upon the camp, and we will be destroyed, except the widow, who will be rescued by either Coffin or Cojeta Jim."

"I see! I see!" Gerald assented. "That accursed adventuress is hastening matters. If she can't get hold of the De Campion fortune by one way, she means to try another."

"You are right. What's to be done? We must prevent Bessie from being kidnapped!"

"Have you seen her, at all, to-day?"

"No. I don't think she has left her tent."

"Then, go at once, and see if she is awake. We must warn her to be on her guard. When the ruffians come to kidnap her, they'll meet with a warm reception."

Noel hastily left the tent, but returned, greatly excited, a few minutes later.

"She's gone!" he ejaculated. "Editha says she left the tent, about daybreak, and wandered off along the lake-shore, and has not since returned."

"Then, a search must be made for her!" Gerald cried, leaping to his feet. "I'll find her, for Deadwood Dick's sake, or I'll die, in the attempt. You remain here, and guard the camp. If either of those ruffians come near here during my absence, shoot them down without mercy!"

And dashing from the tent, Gerald saddled his horse and rode southward, along the lake-shore.

Noel gazed after him, wistfully.

"I am afraid something terrible has happened to Bessie, and that we all are doomed. Sorry was the day we ever came to Beelzebub's Basin."

Later, he improved an opportunity to visit his father, when the madam was not present.

The major was very pale and weak, and there was a wild look of terror in his eyes.

"My son! my son!" he gasped. "I am so glad you came. Where is Gerald?"

"Gerald is gone in search of Bessie, who is nowhere to be found. We fear she has been kidnapped."

"Kidnapped? Good God! What do you mean—by whom?"

"By the giant, Pete Coffin, and at the instance of the woman who has not only been poisoning your mind, but your body also. Father, have I not always been a dutiful son to you?"

"Yes, Noel."

"Have you ever caught me in an untruth?"

"No, I have not."

"Then, if I tell you of the discovery I have made, will you believe me?"

"Yes, my boy, I will believe you quicker than any living person."

"Excepting the madam?"

"No, not excepting her, for I am beginning to partly distrust her."

"Heaven knows, it is nearly time! Listen to me, and I will make you curse yourself that you ever trusted her!" Noel declared.

He then told the major of the woman's clandestine meeting with Pete Coffin, and the plot that was then and there revealed.

Major De Campion listened attentively, until the finish, and then groaned aloud, in his misery and anger.

"I see it all!" he gasped, passing his hand over his forehead. "I have been a fool—a blind idiot, not to have seen before that this base creature has been making me a weak tool of her vile schemes. But, thank Heaven! the spell is broken before it is too late. You may go now, Noel, and tell her I want her at once. You need not return until I send for you."

"Very well, father. Be careful not to exasperate her into doing you further harm!"

Noel left the tent, and meeting Mrs. De Blandford outside, sent her to the major, while he threw himself upon the ground in front of his own tent.

Mrs. De Blandford did not remain long in the major's tent, but soon came sweeping toward Noel, her face flushed with rage incarnate.

"Curse you!" she hissed, as she passed before Noel, and shook her clinched fist. "So you, too, have been backcapping me, have you? Curse you, I say! I'll get even with you, you meddling, some whelp, and in a way you won't like, too!"

Then she swept on.

Noel arose, and joined Editha and Todd, who were conversing together not far away.

"Miss Editha—Mr. Todd!" he said, "I have something important to tell you. There is every likelihood that the giant ruffian's wolves will be let loose on us, to-night, and if they are, our fate will be something terrible. Every one will have to look out for one's self, and God help us all."

"Good heavings! Is there no deuced way we can escape this horrible calamity?"

"You know as well as I. There are your horses, and on them you can try it, if you like. It's your only choice between life and death. There is nothing to detain you from going; but I must remain with my father."

And he left them. Come what might he would not leave his father.

Shortly afterward he saw the madam, Todd, Editha and Bugstein holding an animated discussion, and the madam was evidently much incensed—probably because the others wanted to flee from the camp.

Her objections, however, seemed to be of little effect, for during the afternoon three horses were made ready, and Editha, Todd and Bugstein rode away, and were soon lost to view in the canyon.

Only three persons were now left in the camp—Noel, the widow and the major.

About sunset two horsemen were seen approaching, and it was easy to distinguish that they were Pete Coffin and Cojeta Jim.

Midway between the mouth of the canyon and the camp, Cojeta Jim drew rein; the giant, however, came on. Seizing his rifle, Noel De Campion stood in front of his father's tent, ready for emergency.

Coffin soon drew rein near at hand.

"Hello, there!" he cried, addressing Noel, "whar's all the folks, young feller?"

"There's but three of us left in camp—myself, my sick father, and the Widow De Blandford," Noel replied. "The rest have all taken their departure."

At this juncture Mrs. De Blandford issued from the major's tent, pale and frightened.

"Hillo, thar!" cried the giant. "Whar's that gal ye promised me, ye she-devil? Whar is she, cuss yer?"

"Indeed, sir," the widow replied, "I do not

know. She disappeared from camp this morning, and nothing has been seen of her since."

"That's a likely story. Howsmever, et don't make no difference. 'Tain't ther gal we want so much as it aire the money. So just perceed to fork over what cash thar be in camp, and be quick about it, too. No kickin' or monkeyin' about it, neither. I want the durocks, and the durocks I'm going to have, or bu'st suthin'!"

"You'll not get a cent of our money," cried Noel, "and I warn you to be gone at once, or I'll put a bullet through you."

"Ye will, will ye? No, I'll be cussed if you will," and, quick as flash, the giant whipped a self-cocking revolver from his belt and fired.

The shot was a death-shot, but poor Noel managed to steady himself long enough to raise his rifle, and send a bullet crashing through the giant's brain.

An instant later and two lifeless bodies lay stretched upon the ground.

"Heavens! death is a horrible thing," the widow gasped, as she gazed at the corpses. "Two dead men here, and another in there"—with a glance at the major's tent. "Ugh! I must flee from here ere Gerald returns."

She turned and gazed in the direction where Cojeta Jim had halted, expecting to see him bearing down upon the camp.

Instead, however, she saw him riding furiously back toward the mouth of the canyon.

"Good God! I believe he intends to set the wolves free," she gasped. "I must hasten, or I shall be too late."

She rushed into the tent, and opening a travel-sack which sat at the head of the major's bed, she removed a bundle of bank-notes and some legal-looking documents.

These she put carefully away about her person.

The major lay upon the bed, his glassy eyes apparently fixed upon her; but he, too, was silent in death!

His features were distorted, and clearly-defined finger-marks upon his throat betrayed the fact that he had been strangled.

The madam gave the dead man a horrified glance, and shuddered, as she turned to go.

But, she did not go!

She stopped stock-still, and an exclamation of terror burst from her lips, for there, in the entrance to the tent, stood one whom she had good reason to fear—the Old Man!

"Nay, be not afraid of me, Sarah Jane," he said, mockingly, "for I do not propose to harm you. Your retribution will overtake you, soon enough, without my staining my hands with your blood. I see you remember me. Do you likewise remember how, when, a poor broken-down tramp, I returned to Live Oaks, you had me arrested and sent to prison? I didn't stay in prison long, Sarah Jane; I broke jail, and came back West to retrieve my fortunes, that I might some day be able to meet you by law—fight you by law. Good fortune at last favored me, and threw you in my power."

"I don't propose to fight you, nor that you shall fight me. You will have something else to fight, far more desperate. Hark! do you listen to that?"

Utterly stricken, the widow did listen, although she need not have done so, to understand his meaning. Night was falling over the camp, and in the distance was heard the unmistakable bark of a wolf, followed, almost immediately afterward, by a series of barks, that certainly sounded blood-curdling enough to suit the most carnal-minded.

"Pete Coffin's wolves are free," the Old Man said, grimly, "and will soon be here, on their errand of vengeance. Their vengeance, will also be my revenge, Sarah Smithers!"

He turned then, and strode from the tent and with a horrified shriek, the woman staggered after him.

"Stop! stop!" she screamed. "For the love of God, do not desert me!"

He paid not the slightest attention to her appeal, but, reaching the water's edge, he entered a small birchen canoe, and paddled swiftly away.

And, the mantle of night soon hid him from view.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BATTLE—CONCLUSION.

DEADWOOD DICK found his dungeon in the rock more cheery than might have been supposed, and at once set about making himself as comfortable as circumstances would admit.

He knew he was booked for an extraordinary proceeding, and philosophically concluded that, as there was no escape from it, there was like-

wise no use of borrowing any unnecessary trouble about it.

When the hour arrived, he would do his part in the singular drama, and that would be the end of it.

When night came, he was brought a comfortable repast of roast bear and coffee, and was likewise supplied for breakfast, the next morning.

From the time he was locked up, however, until the next evening, he saw nothing of the Old Man, except at a distance.

While Dick felt pretty well satisfied that the chief of the Silent Tongues was, in reality, Colonel Bly, the father of Bessie, he of course was not positive and consequently was left in a state of annoying certainty.

If his veiled bride was to be pretty Bessie Bly, he would have much preferred to know the fact, in advance of the ceremony.

If the Old Man was not Colonel Bly, Dick reflected, how was he to know, until too late, who or what he was marrying? She might be an Indian squaw.

The night for the battle between Deadwood Dick and Peepo Hager at last arrived, and the prisoner was by no means sorry, when it came.

The silent tongued miners ceased their labors with pick and shovel, about seven o'clock, in the evening, and devoted themselves to preparing for the coming duel. Two camp-fires of pine-knots and cones were built upon the cavern bottom, and flaring torches of the same were thrust here and there, in niches in the wall, making the cavern light in every part.

Dick had just finished his evening meal, when the Old Man came along, and unlocked the dungeon door.

"Are you ready for the fight?" he asked.

"As ready as I ever shall be, I reckon, except that I haven't got any weapons," replied Dick.

"Oh! you will be furnished them, in good time. You can come forth, now, and stretch yourself, providing you will promise not to run away."

"Thanks, I don't think there's any danger of my escaping far, even if I tried to," Dick responded, as he stepped from his prison.

He and the Old Man sauntered about the cavern, chatting as if they had been old friends.

"Considering the large probability that I will soon become your son-in-law, there are two questions I would like to ask."

"Well, what do you want to know?"

"First of all, this: I found a canoe on the beach, attached to which was a chain, running a distance into the water. What I want to know is, does that chain connect with this cavern?"

"Virtually so, as a passageway or fissure runs from this place to the water's edge. The external opening of this fissure is so peculiar that one would not know it, except by rowing at the base of the cliff."

"Ah! I see. Now, one more question, and my curiosity will be satisfied. How about that apparition, which appeared on the surface of the lake?"

The Old Man laughed.

"Oh, that was only a little pleasantry of mine, to prevent strangers making too free about the lake. It was produced with a machine of my invention, and embodying some of the principles of the stereopticon."

"The hour for your battle with Peepo, the dwarf, is near at hand. You had better make ready, and my advice is that you make sure of your man, with your first arrow, or you may not get the second chance."

The Old Man blew a shrill call upon his whistle, and summoned Peepo and the Silent Tongues to his presence.

"The time for the contest has arrived," he announced. "Trull, you may measure off fifty paces."

This was done, and a burning ember from the fire placed at either end of the distance as a goal.

Dick and Peepo were then each supplied with a strong Indian bow, and a quiver of arrows, and told to take their places, which they promptly did.

The Silent Tongues were then formed to one side, with their chief a pace in front of them.

"Peepo Hager and Richard Bristol," said the Old Man, "you are now to face each other in mortal combat, and with bow and arrows as weapons, fight until one or the other of you falls, killed or disabled. The Silent Tongues do not want any wounded men on their hands to care for, and so recommend that one of you be killed outright. Make ready, now, and the moment my revolver speaks—fight!"

There was no reply, but each man faced his opponent with a bow drawn and arrow fixed. The hideous dwarf seemed eager and confident.

As for Deadwood Dick, he was perfectly cool and steady nerved, but hardly what might be termed confident, for he had never had much practice at archery. But he did not falter.

He grasped his weapons firmly and waited for the signal.

The Old Man drew his revolver, raised it in the air, and—

There was a ringing report that echoed and re-echoed through the cavern.

But, it was not the Old Man who had fired. His pistol remained undischarged.

Immediately following the report there was a wild screech, and Peepo, the dwarf, sprung into the air and fell back—dead!

At the same instant a man was seen approaching from the foot of the corridors.

He carried a white handkerchief tied to the muzzle of his rifle as a flag of truce, and accordingly no action was taken against his approach.

Deadwood Dick's astonishment may be imagined, when he saw that the man was no other than Gerald De Campion.

As he came within speaking distance, Gerald halted, and doffing his hat, he said:

"Gentlemen, it was my bullet that killed the dwarf. I fired it intentionally. Two days ago, I tried, while in a fit of jealousy, to kill your guest, Deadwood Dick—a man of men, whom I should have most honored and respected.

"I thought I had succeeded in his murder, but on reaching this strange place in my search for Bessie Bly, I found that Richard Bristol was not dead, but in imminent peril. I resolved to save his life, and, therefore, killed the dwarf. I am now at your disposal, to be done with as it shall please you. I am only glad that I saved Deadwood Dick from harm."

There was a brief silence, during which the chief held a whispered consultation with several of the Silent Tongues, and then turned to Gerald.

"Stranger!" he said, "your act is one that should receive our condemnation, but as your intervention was in favor of a man whom we think well of, we are inclined to make Deadwood Dick the man who shall pass judgment."

"An office which I cheerfully accept. Gerald De Campion, I forgive you for raising your hand against me, knowing that jealousy caused you to do as you did. As you are here, and as I propose to remain here but a short time, I recommend that the Old Man appoint you his lieutenant in the place of the dwarf, Peepo Hager. You are a brave, honest man, and will make an able and efficient worker."

This announcement was received by nods of approval from the Silent Tongues.

Seeing which, the Old Man said:

"Then, so be it! Gerald De Campion, I accept of Bristol's appointment, and you are henceforth my chief aide and adviser—such a person as I have long needed, and which the vindictive Peepo could never be."

Gerald advanced, and first extended his hand to Deadwood Dick.

"I don't deserve it," he said, his dark face working with emotion, "but I ask your forgiveness."

"And I freely grant it," was the reply.

"The marriage will now take place!" the Old Man commanded. "Trull, please bring my daughter and the parson. Grizzly Jack, you remove the body of Peepo."

The body of the unfortunate dwarf was soon carried out of sight, and then from a passage, opening off the cavern, came Trull, with the minister—a lanky, solemn-visaged individual—and the bride-elect, who was deeply veiled.

Deadwood Dick's heart gave a jump, as he saw her approach, for he recognized her outer garments as being the same that Bessie Bly usually wore about the camp.

Turning to the Old Man, as the party came up, Deadwood Dick said:

"Colonel Bly, according to my agreement, I am ready to marry your estimable daughter, but, knowing that the veiled lady is Miss Bessie, I'd much rather this would be an open-faced matter. I think it would be most agreeable all around."

"Perhaps so," the Old Man replied, with a shrug. "I must say, however, that your powers of perception are remarkably keen."

"I suspected that you were Colonel Bly, as soon as Bessie told me the story of her life."

Of course Bessie raised her veil, and she and Dick were left to themselves for a few minutes.

In that brief space of time they seemed to come

to an understanding upon the point in question, and soon afterward announced their readiness to have the nuptial-knot tied.

Accordingly, they "stood up," as they say down East, and the reverend gentleman, whom the Old Man had imported for the occasion, performed the interesting rites that made Richard Bristol and Betsy Bly man and wife.

At the conclusion of the ceremony the Silent Tongues gave three resounding cheers for the Prince and Princess of Old Man's Cave, and there was a season of congratulatory hand-shaking.

Gerald De Campion was the last to offer his congratulations, having remained quietly aloof until a favorable opportunity; then he approached and extended both hands.

"I congratulate you both from the bottom of my heart," he said, evidently earnest and candid. "This is as it should be, and I wish you both success without stint and uninterrupted happiness through life!"

Poor fellow! Man of passion that he was, it must have cost him an effort to go through this ordeal; but he did go through it bravely, and felt better far, afterward.

The Silent Tongues also had additional cause for rejoicing on account of the marriage, for, calling them together, the Old Man said:

"Gentlemen, it affords me great pleasure, at last, to give you a surprise. You have all acted well, under my charge, and I don't think you have much to complain of in me as a master. In fact, I doubt if there is a man of you who desires to leave this place for good. Here we have been mates—here let us remain as long as there is anything worth remaining for. Henceforth I abolish all rules of the Hagers, with the exception of leaving the cavern without my sanction and the approval of the majority. The Silent Tongues of other days are henceforth no more."

And, as may be supposed, there was great rejoicing in the wonderful cavern of Mount Mab.

What became of Bugstein, Raphael De Percy Todd and Editha, was not known at the cavern. That they escaped was the earnest hope of all, and especially of tender-hearted Bessie.

Deadwood Dick remained for a short time, and then made ready for departure.

To his wife and the colonel he said:

"Bessie is my wife, and, as such, I shall love and honor her. My path in life, however, lies in another direction, and I cannot remain here. When you emerge from this place of seclusion, and settle down within the bounds of civilization, as you will do sooner or later, I will rejoin you, and prove by my devotion to you both, that this enforced marriage has been for our mutual well-being and happiness."

"We cannot demur, Richard," said the Old Man kindly. "Such a life as this I well know, is not for you, nor for Bessie either, so, as you say, sooner or later I shall seek civilization again, and with the wealth I have acquired make a home of which you, my brave son, and you, my devoted daughter, will be proud."

So it was arranged, and with the early morn of the third day after the marriage, Deadwood Dick was again astride of his faithful steed, making his way out of that wild region—never to behold Mount Mab again.

THE END.

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The Banner Weekly is Published at the Following Rates:

For Four Months.....\$1.00
For One Year.....3.00
Two Copies for One Year.....5.00
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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
98 William Street New York.